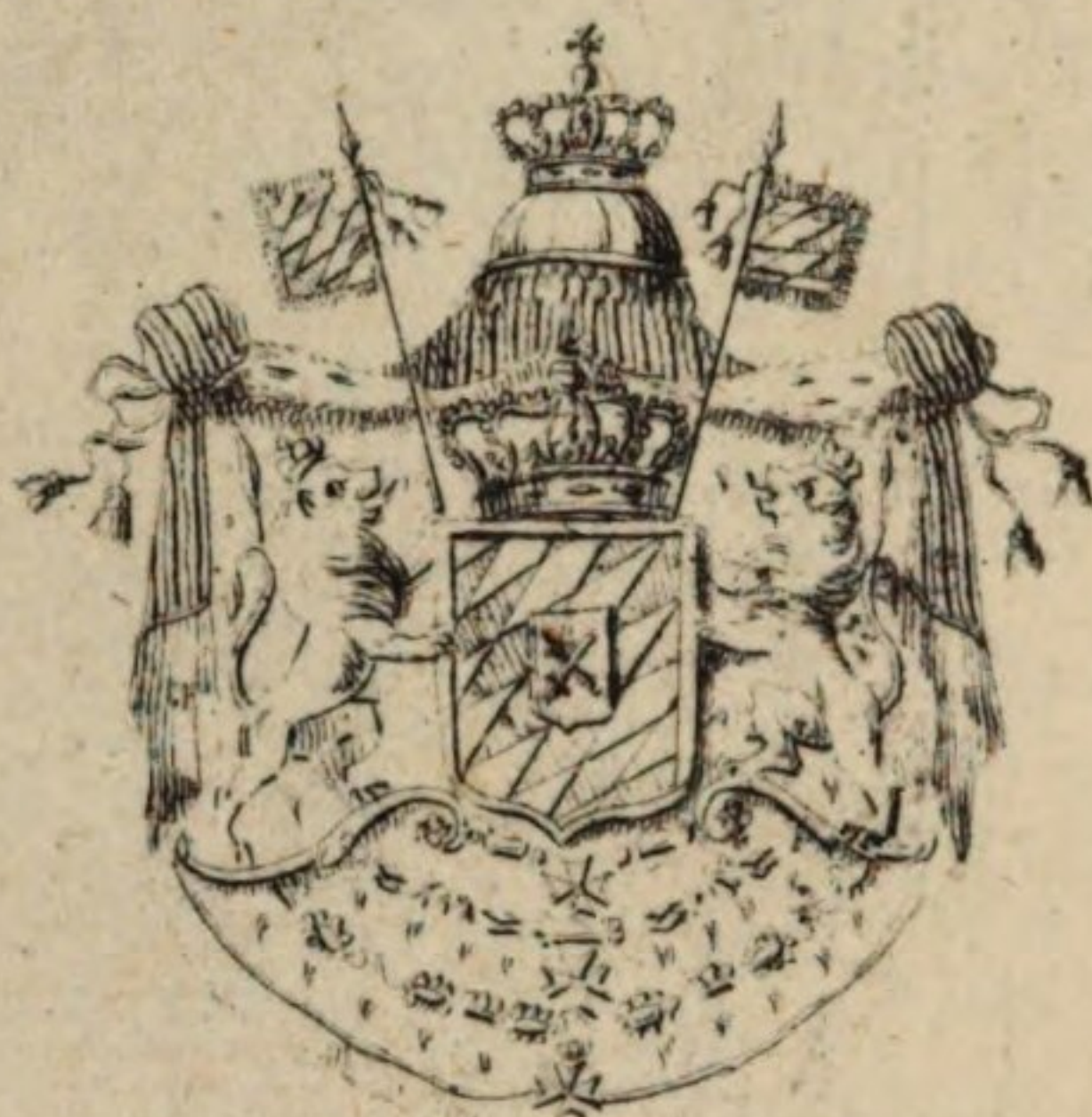




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ZOHRAB
THE HOSTAGE.

VOL. I.

LONDON :
PRINTED BY SAMUEL BENTLEY,
Dorset Street, Fleet Street.

ZOHRA B

THE HOSTAGE.

BY THE
AUTHOR OF "HAJJI BABA."

Hatred after hatred has been manifested by thee, O Tyrant Chief! and
thy secret rancour has been revealed.

THE POEM OF AMRU, IN THE MOLLAKAT.

THIRD EDITION,
REVISED AND CORRECTED,
WITH ILLUSTRATIVE NOTES, NOW FIRST ADDED.

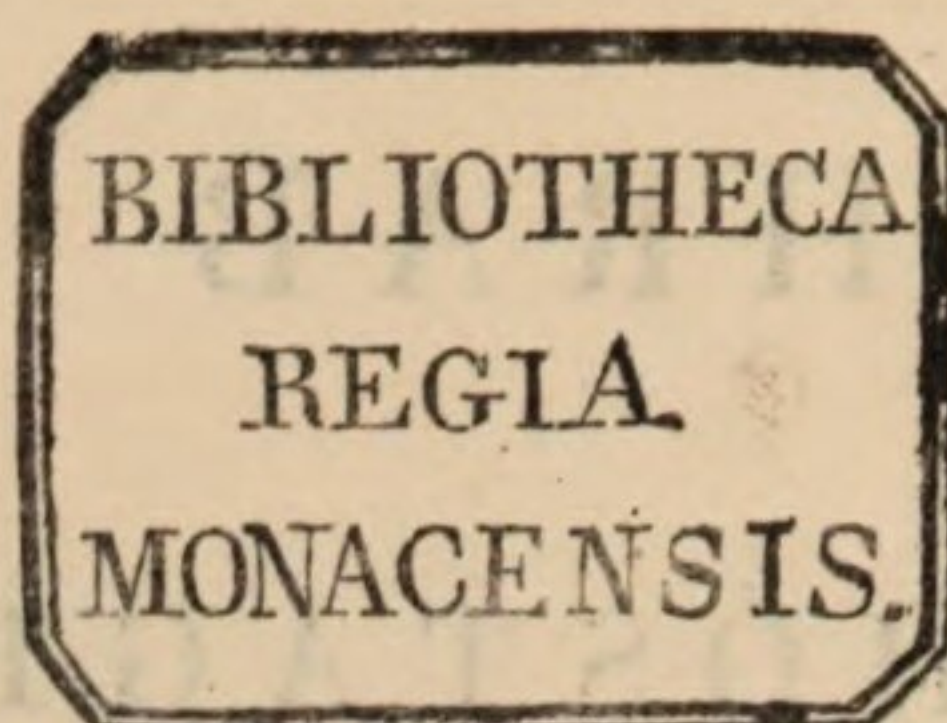
IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

LONDON:
RICHARD BENTLEY, NEW BURLINGTON STREET.
(SUCCESSOR TO HENRY COLBURN.)

1833.

244.D.



PREFACE.

I HAVE often thought that when a jeweller sends home a piece of plate, or some elaborate work of his art, in common honesty he ought to inform his employer how much real gold or silver he has expended in the work, and how much alloy; his purchaser would thus know to a certainty what quantity of the precious metal he possesses, and what he must place to the capricious and uncertain value of fashion and workmanship. So it appears to me, that the author of a book like the present, in which history and fiction are combined, is bound to

inform the reader how much of each is placed before him; the historical facts would thus be preserved, whilst the fiction might be thrown away, after the object of amusement had been attained, or the table-talk of the day had evaporated.

In this book, I confess that the quantum of history is very small indeed in proportion to the fiction. It may be compared to the small canal by means of which, in the East, water is made to meander through a cultivated field, fertilizing the tract through which it passes, but without which it would be barren and without value.

My hero and heroine are fictitious,* but my tyrannical King belongs to history. No one

* Amena, Amema, or Amima, was the name of Mohamed's mother. Zohrab is a name well known in Persian history.

who has ever visited Persia can forget the many stories which all ranks, from the prince to the mule-driver, are so ready to relate of the famous Aga Mohamed Shah, famous for his cruelty, his wisdom, and his wars. From the coasts of the Persian Gulf to Shiraz — from Shiraz to Ispahan and Tehran — from Tehran to Tabriz, and to the very heart of Georgia, the history of Aga Mohamed is known and repeated. There are many, no doubt, still alive, who can even now tremble at the recollection of his name, and can still feel a certain sensation in the region of the neck when they call to mind the ominous aspect of his ferocious countenance.

If those who conceive that the character which I have endeavoured to draw of the tyrant is overcharged and improbable, will give themselves the trouble to turn to the

reign of Aga Mohamed, in the History of Persia,* I am sure they will allow, from the facts there recorded, that I have safely kept within the confines of truth. In the narrative of the siege of Kerman, in particular, where the enormities of his cruelty are described, and which I have had in view in my imaginary attack upon Asterabad, they will find such horrors recorded, as will throw those which I attempt to describe far into the shade. But it has not been my object to draw a miniature picture of his character; I have only attempted a sketch. He is my prototype, and I have placed him in my narrative, as a painter sometimes inserts a dragon, or some such monster, in the foreground of his landscape. Many true and characteristic anecdotes of this

* See Sir John Malcolm's History of Persia, vol. ii. 8vo edition.

extraordinary person might have been introduced; but I found that, like bolts driven into a wheel, which while they strengthen, make it heavy, such additions, though they might have given more truth, would have encumbered the progress of my story, and embarrassed the scheme which I had planned.

Aga Mohamed deprived one of his brothers of his eyesight, and murdered a second. The history of him whom I have called Hussein Kûli has a slight reference to the fate of both these unfortunate men.

The Prince Fattedh Ali, who is supposed to be the present King of Persia, the Vizir Hajji Ibrahim, the slave Sadek, belong to history; but the humpbacked barber, the ardent Zulma, the officious Shir Khan, Zaul Khan, the Astarabadis and Turcomans, and others, have been created to serve the purposes of my tale. The

anecdote of the Shah and the bloody handkerchief, in the first volume, and that of counting the eyes with the handle of his whip in the third, among others, were related to me by credible witnesses. The mode of the Shah's death is historical—the details, fiction.

It would be tedious, and indeed unnecessary, to define where history ends and fiction begins, in the different turns and windings which the thread of my narrative takes; and perhaps it will be sufficient to say, that my object has been to place before the reader a succession of personages, whose manner of speech, whose thoughts and actions, and general deportment, are illustrative of Persia and the East; and I have thought it right to preserve oriental idioms whenever it suited my purpose, although perhaps, in so doing, I transgress against grammatical propriety, particularly when tran-

sitions are made from the first to the third person in the same sentence; but in all this I have endeavoured never to lose sight of the precept—

“*Respicere exemplar vitæ morumque jubebo
Doctum imitatore, et vivas hinc ducere voces.*”

Although it may be urged that such characters as my hero and heroine are not known in Persia, yet let me say that there is no good reason why they should not. It has been remarked that the principles which actuate them are not likely to be produced by the doctrines of the Koran; but we often see in the votaries of a false religion an excellence, however produced, which seems to be guided by the true one. Let me ask those who have lived in the East, and particularly in Turkey, whether they have not been acquainted with Mahomedans

there whose conduct in life would have done credit to Christianity?

We are told,—Either follow tradition, or invent such fables as are consistent with themselves :

“ Aut famam sequere, aut sibi convenientia finge.”

I have endeavoured so to do ; and this must be my best answer to those who probably will condemn incongruities and insist upon historical accuracy, not reflecting that I do not pretend to the dignity of an historian, and at most lay claim to the humbler character of an inventor of fables.

THE AUTHOR.

Z O H R A B.

CHAPTER I.

Then the frogs had an ugly king, but what could they do?

LOCKMAN.

THE Sun, about to renew its annual ceremony of entering Aries, and giving a new year to Persia, had already acquired considerable power, which began to be sensibly felt in the close atmosphere of Tehran. The stillness of the morning had been broken by the cry of the muezzins from the mosques to announce the morning prayer at break of day, when Sadek, a Georgian slave, sleeping in an ante-room, in attendance upon the tyrant of Persia, started

from a broken slumber, and awoke in the greatest alarm. He filled the post of chief valet, and with Hashim his deputy occupied a small room adjacent to the saloon in which his master himself reposed.

The Shah had taken up his abode in one of the principal *imarehs*, an octagonal building situated in the centre of a vast shrubbery, laid out in extensive walks, planted with waving poplars and majestic chenar trees, and kept in constant freshness by fountains, the splashings of whose waters, unceasing and unvaried, were great promoters of that sedate and contemplative mood in general so prized by Oriental nations. Such was the arrangement whenever the royal couch was not spread within the harem; for there women and their guardians were his protectors; but as the winter passed away, the warmer apartments were forsaken for some house within the precincts of the palace, the insulated situation of which was more open to the breeze.

During the still hours of night no sound was heard save the distant challenge of the sentinels

in the towers of the Ark, and at the intervals prescribed by the Mahomedan law the solemn cry from the minarets, at once the confession of the mussulman's faith and the signal for his orisons. In the daytime the notes of thousands of birds, and principally that of the indefatigable *bulbul*, each at their stated time delighted the ear, whilst ever and anon the peacock, of which many ranged throughout the palace grounds, threw out its wild and discordant cries. At intervals between the walks, intersecting each other at various angles, were seen condensed plantations of rose-trees, which, when in full flower, so highly embalmed the air that their influence was felt all over the seraglio, and, as the court poet of the day said, "intoxicated the senses, and made the heart drunk." For this reason this enchanting spot was called the *Gulistan*, or the Rose Garden.

The building itself was admirably adapted for coolness and repose. It was open on all sides by doors and casements, which could be closed at pleasure. In the centre was a large saloon of singular construction, containing within its

vast dimensions retiring corners, where the occupant might enjoy the passing breeze from whatever point it chanced to blow, and was surmounted by a lofty cupola, highly ornamented with arabesques, its walls being painted with traits of history, descriptive of the Shah's own exploits.

It was here that the ruler of the great empire of Persia, we will not say reposed, but sought repose, against the horrors of a mind at enmity with all mankind, and at variance with itself. His slumbers, like the flickerings of an unsubdued flame, were broken and irregular; during their short intervals, brief exclamations would come from his lips, indicative of the inward warring of his heart. When awake, his aspect, like the adjacent heights of Albors, almost ever darkened by clouds, seemed to forebode storm; and there was truth in the remark, that his smile was as much the forerunner of disaster as his frown was of death.

Will it then be thought extraordinary that Sadek, whose duty was to watch and not to sleep, should have started with dismay at find-

ing that he might have transgressed? His first impulse was to sit upright in his bed, and then, scarcely permitting himself to draw breath, to give an anxious ear towards the Shah's chamber. Having satisfied himself that all was right, his next care was to awaken Hashim, who had been long taking full advantage of his turn to sleep; which having accomplished in the quietest manner, he invited him to leave his bed, in order that they might seat themselves upon the steps which led into the shrubbery, and thus be at sufficient liberty to talk without being heard, yet still near enough the royal person to catch the least indication of his stirring.

Sadek was a steady-looking man, of a serious and determined countenance, strongly marked by anxiety, and by the despair of ever exactly making his actions suit the wayward and suspicious disposition of the extraordinary character upon whom he waited. He had ever been a faithful adherent to the Shah and his family, and with proper treatment would have remained firm in his fidelity until death; but as he detested injustice, so he deplored the cruelty of

his master's mind ; and although he could put up with his passion when himself a sufferer, yet he could not countenance it when it fell heavily upon others. His resolution was equal to any danger. So long as he felt that intentions towards him were kind, he was devotedly passive ; but whenever he knew the contrary, he became a most dangerous enemy.

Hashim was a much younger man, for the down had scarcely begun to show itself upon his cheeks ; whereas a thick and characteristic beard completed the manly cast of Sadek's face. The disposition of the youth, too, was to be formed. At present it was light and thoughtless. Although he trembled as he stood before the tyrant, (for what mortal could do otherwise ?) yet when left to himself he had no cares, and only seemed to enjoy the present moment.

“ Do tell me,” said Sadek, looking to the east, “ tell me, Hashim, whether that be the dawn or the false dawn ? If it be the false, we are safe ; but if the real, our ears are not worth two ghaz the pair. You know the Shah hunts to-day, and we are ordered to awaken him an hour before the dawn. What is to be done ? ”

“ I can’t distinguish one dawn from another,” said Hashim ; “ you are more of a weather-gazer than I, and therefore ought to know. All I wish is, that the dawns were in *jehanum* (hell), and that you had let me sleep on.”

“ Sleep on !” exclaimed Sadek ; “ to sleep on were to sleep to eternity. You ass, or worse than ass ; for an ass sees a precipice when he comes to the brink, and starts ; whereas you would fall straightway down it with your eyes open. Go up to yonder terrace, youngster ! look well towards the peak of Demawend, and tell me whether you see day-light appearing. Go, and return immediately !”

Hashim did as he was told, and came back, saying that no particular light was visible on the horizon, but that lights were seen in the quadrangle of the palace in which the Khajeh Bashi, the chief eunuch, resided ; and that he heard the inhabitants thereof awake and stirring.”

“ Ahi !” said Sadek, “ this hunting excursion will take up several days, since the lady Amima is to be of the party : it behoves the Khajeh Bashi to see that she be properly attended, else

his ugly head will pay for it. She and the humpbacked barber are the only two things in this world that the Shah seems to care for."

"And don't you add, too, his chief executioner?" remarked Hashim. "I should be sorry to fall into that tiger's clutches."

Here they were suddenly stopped by some indistinct sounds which issued from the King's apartment.

"The lion is awake!" exclaimed Sadek, in a whisper; "hist!"

He stepped to the door, and gently lifting up the silken curtain which hung over it, waiting there for a minute in an attitude of suspense, he returned, saying, "He was only making one of his usual starts; he sleeps on: but something must be done. Go, Hashim, to Ismael Khan, who heads the guard at the hall of audience entrance, and inquire how much it wants to the 'first call of morning.' You can't mistake him; for he sleeps with his bed-head placed against the threshold of the wicket gate."

Hashim returned with the intelligence that the guard were already on foot, and that Ismael

Khan had told him that it wanted about an hour to the break of day.

Just as he had said this, a loud, shrill, and querulous voice, such as a phantom might be imagined to utter, if the unearthly had ever spoken, was heard in the apartment, vociferating, “*Ahi bacha! ahi pedersukhteh.* Ye children of grilling fathers! come! appear!”

Although accustomed to this sort of salutation, yet the blood forsook the faces of the two attendants, and their hearts leaped into their mouths, at being thus forestalled in the performance of their duty. Sadek immediately quitting his slippers entered the apartment, and making his lowest obeisance, stood before the Shah, who was already sitting upright on his couch preparatory to rising.

“At length you are pleased to come, are you, you sleeping varlet! The Shah and his empire might have been lost for what you cared, provided you enjoyed your sleep to its very dregs,” said the King to his slave.

“May I be your sacrifice!” exclaimed Sadek, “but I was this moment about to stand before

the asylum of the universe. Your humble slave has been watching the dawn for this hour past."

"A churl like you, who lives without a care, save what food and sleep require, to talk of the dawn!" exclaimed the Shah; "whilst you go on thus, you will scarcely be able to distinguish a mule from an ass by daylight, much less a grey horse from a white one in the dark.* Go, call the Humpback," continued he, "and order the chief astrologer to be in waiting. Bid the Khajeh Bashi, the grand huntmaster, and the master of the horse, to be in attendance."

Before Sadek left the room to execute this order, he lifted his master from his couch which was spread on the carpeted floor, by placing his hand under the armpit; and now that we have him fairly upon his legs, the reader will perhaps be curious to become more intimately acquainted with the person of the extraordinary being who will form one of the principal features of the following narrative.

Nature, in forming Aga Mohamed Shah, in-

* The Persian mode of distinguishing dawn from daylight.

tended to have installed a mind of uncommon vigour into a body capable of seconding its energies, by making it full of activity and strength; but the whole scheme was frustrated by the cruelty of man. Whilst the sharpness of intellect was preserved, it became diseased with ill-humour and moroseness, for every time that his body became an object of contemplation, he entertained such disgust towards himself that the feeling finished by placing him at enmity with all mankind. His person, which would otherwise have been tall and erect, was now bent with the curve of apparent age: what would have been strength of muscle and breadth of shoulder, seemed blighted and shrivelled. His face, particularly in a country where beards are universally worn, appeared like a blotch of leprosy, for it was almost totally hairless,—it could only boast of a few straggling bristles, which here and there sprouted at irregular distances, like stunted trees upon a poor soil. The skin which covered it resembled wetted parchment, hanging in baggy furrows down the cheeks, under the chin and about the neck. This spectral

countenance, for so it might be called, was, however, lighted up by a pair of small grey eyes of more than human lustre, which, from under two ragged curtains of eyelids, flashed all their intelligence abroad, and as they expressed rage, jealousy, or cruelty, made those who were exposed to their fire feel as if they were under the fascination of some blood-seeking monster. But with all this there were moments when this face would smile, and would even relax into looks of pity and benevolence; but so treacherous were these symptoms esteemed, that at length they were only looked upon as signals of some extraordinary disaster, or as beacons to warn those in danger to be upon their guard.

The Shah had scarcely dismissed his attendant, before the Humpback glided into the apartment, bearing in his hand the silver basin, the towels, and all the apparatus for shaving. There was in the appearance of this being something so mysterious, and at the same time so hideous, that it was generally supposed the Shah had selected him for his important office, in order to keep himself in good humour with his own de-

formities. His immense head, placed in a snug nook between his high shoulders and a protecting hump behind, supported on a pair of slender legs, and accompanied by arms and hands of immense length and strength, put one in mind of an ill-conditioned scarecrow. The expression of his face was scarcely human—heavy eyelids giving protection to a flashing eyeball; lips of the ape overshadowed by a profusion of hair; and a cunning and malignancy of smile which made the skin to creep and the heart to loathe.

He went doggedly about his work, like one much at his ease though full of design,—it was the ichneumon waiting upon the crocodile. Being a sort of privileged attendant, he was the depositary of many of his master's secret thoughts, the instrument of many of his acts of tyranny, and was therefore hated as a spy, and dreaded as an informer.

The barber took possession of his master's head as a commodity peculiarly his own, washed it, shaved it, and trimmed it with a dexterity and courage, considering to whom it belonged, which none but a being of his audacity could

have ventured upon. Few words passed between them, but such as were spoken were full of import, and characteristic of the terms upon which they were.

“Baba Khan goes to-morrow,” said the Shah.

“As I am your sacrifice, yes,” said the Humpback, “he goes.”

“There is no harm in that boy,” said the King.

“No, none, *now*,” answered the barber in a suppressed croak, laying some stress on *now*.

“And why *now*?” said the Shah.

“He will soon feel that he is to be a king,” said the Humpback, “and that makes a difference.”

“By the head of the Shah!” said the King, stopping the barber’s hand, “let him keep his eyes open; I allow none to be ambitious but myself in my kingdom. What crooked thoughts are passing in thy crooked carcase?”

“Your slave spoke of those around him. The meat may be wholesome, but the garnish poison.”

“You must keep watch upon those who surround him,” said the Shah, after a moment’s

thought ; “ I must know who and what they are.”

“ Upon my eyes be it !” said the Humpback ;
“ there is one, however, of whom none but the Shah can speak.”

“ What words are these !” said the King ;
“ who is that ?”

“ He has a sister,” said the malignant imp.

“ Hold your impious tongue, scoundrel !” exclaimed the monarch. “ Let none speak of the lady Amima unless with that respect due to the only thing which the King loves upon earth. The dust of her feet is collyrium for my eyes.”

The imp cast a sidelong look of malice at his master, and having finished his operation, he stood before the King in an attitude of humility.

“ May I be your sacrifice !—it is done. Am I dismissed ?”—

“ Yes : see that all things be in readiness for a week’s absence. Let the chief astrologer come, and tell him that I mount my horse in an hour, and that the stars must be in readiness.”

As soon as the Humpback had taken his departure, and the King, with the assistance of

Sadek, had dressed himself in his riding costume, he seated himself at the open window, where at a distance, by the side of the marble basin of water, stood the officers whom he had ordered to be in attendance.

To the Khajeh Bashi he said, as with trepidation that officer made the lowest inclination of the body, “ Let the Banou (for so he called his niece) depart immediately ; she may either go on horseback or in *takhteravan* * ; — but, mark you, it is upon your head that the corook† be of the strictest, from here onwards towards Firouzkoh, and to twenty parasangs round that place ; death, instant death, will be the reward of the wretch who crosses the path of my house. Go !”

Of the chief astrologer he inquired—“ Have you a fortunate hour on your astrolabe ? Have we permission to leave our capital to-day ?”

* The *takhteravan* is a conveyance upon the same principle as the Sicilian *latiga* and the Mexican *litera* : a cage supported upon poles between two mules, the one before, the other behind.

† When the Shah’s women leave the palace, a public injunction, called the *Corook*, is made, that no one be seen on their path on pain of death.

“ May I be your sacrifice !” said the stargazer ; “ the fortune of our King, upon whom be blessings and peace, is always on the rise. At one hour, less five minutes, after the morning prayer, the foot of activity must be placed in the stirrup of accomplishment ; and just at the full hour, the hoofs of the royal steed must strike on the threshold of the imperial gate.”

“ Well, well !” said the Shah, “ you have used your science to good purpose. Go — you have whitened your face this morning.”

To the master of the horse he said—“ What horse do we ride to-day ?”

“ Your slave,” said the khan, “ has prepared for the blessed person of the King of kings the ambling *Murwari*, or pearl, with the turquoise furniture, for the beginning of the journey, and then *Ser-mest*, or drunkard, when your Majesty comes to the hunting-ground.”

“ There is no harm in that,” said the King ; “ be it so ;—you are a good servant ! Collect the gholams, and let the whole equipage be at the gate.”

“ Where does the Shah hunt to-day ?” said

the King to the chief huntsman, who was a stout rough man, weather-beaten withal, with a fine bold countenance. “Where shall we break cover?”

“I have to represent,” said the old sportsman, “if the King orders the greyhounds to be taken into the plain after we have passed the *Teng* or narrow pass, among the low bushes we shall find abundance of hares. Beyond that, striking into the mountains on the left, there are rumours of some two or three *gour khur* (wild asses) having been seen, and if the Shah sees no impediment your slave will place relays of dogs at the proper stations, and thus we may bring one down; for, may their homes be ruined! they are the wariest of all beasts, and as for their speed, we must trust in God and our horses if we hope to overtake them. What else shall I venture to say? Praise be to God! a marksman, with a single ball from off his horse, like unto our Shah, man has never seen; and with the blessing of the Prophet, we may by luck get one of the unsainted beasts.”

“And make a good kabob of him, eh?” said the Shah, smiling.

“Inshallah ! Inshallah !” exclaimed all the attendants.

“Go, go,” said his Majesty, “you are a man of wisdom ; so be it ! But mark ; see that my Georgian gun be in order. After all, the true Lesgui gun is the best. As for your European guns, they are worse than nothing ; they have no weight ; they are made for children, not men.”

“Upon my eyes be it !” said the chief huntsman, and took his leave.

To the tent-pitcher the Shah then addressed himself.

“The Shah sleeps at Bagh Shah to night ; at Firouzkoh the next. Let the tents of the harem be pitched immediately in the inclosed valley of Sawachi ; let the running stream flow through the pavilion of the lady Banou ; let a garden be made ; let fountains play, and let the reservoir be decorated with fruits and flowers. But, as you regard your head, let none but the chosen servants of the *khelwet*, or secret apartments, be near at hand, and let the guards be placed at the avenues of the rocky passages. See that all be in readiness. Go ! the Shah never speaks twice !”

Having dismissed his officers, the King arose to prepare for his morning devotions, of the whole of which he was ever a scrupulous observer, although it was remarked of him, that his greatest acts of cruelty generally succeeded their performance. He first washed his feet, hands and arms, and crown of his head, then repaired to the praying carpet, which, together with the bit of sacred clay, his koran, and his comb, were spread for him in the corner of the room, in the direction of Mecca. Here, with an audible voice, his hands uplifted behind his ears, this dreaded despot began the celebrated *Fatheh*, which all mussulmans look upon as the most perfect form of prayer, and in the repetition of which they daily announce and re-establish their faith in their Prophet. He then went through every genuflection, every inclination, and every salutation of the sacred clay of Mecca, with the most scrupulous precision, while *Sadek* and *Hashim* remained in attendance on the outside of the apartment in breathless suspense.

As soon as the prayer was over, and having gone through the ceremony (for it could be no-

thing else) of combing the two or three straggling hairs that grew on his upper lip, or wandered about in solitude on the surface of his bony chin, he called aloud to his servants that his breakfast might be served. This was done in a simple, unostentatious, though costly manner, the dishes, trays, and covers being of massive gold, whilst the smaller cups were of the finest china. Sadek on one knee placed the *khonchehs* before his royal master, the whole having been previously uncovered by breaking the seal of the chief cook, who had tasted the whole, and pronounced it fit for the royal palate—in other words, that it contained no poison.

Whilst this was performing, a light and elegant figure was seen gliding through the avenues of the garden, dressed from head to foot in a riding costume, his small cap gracefully thrown on the side of his head, an embossed sword by his side, a sparkling diamond-hilted dagger in his girdle, and an enamelled-handled whip of many thongs dangling at his wrist. His face was beautiful; the nose strongly arched; his eyes large, black, and full of fire; the expression

of his smile quite enchanting; and his whole appearance full of animated youth, spirit and grace. This was Fattedh Ali Mirza,* the despot's nephew, and proclaimed successor to his throne.

The birds were all alive and at their morning carols, filling the grove with animated sounds and chirpings, and the sun was preparing to rise through the cloudless sky, when this beautiful youth stopped on the brink of the marble basin, and made his obeisance to his uncle, bending his head negligently forward, whilst his right hand rested on his girdle.

The King ate on, without paying the least attention to his youthful visiter, plunging his hand, apparently with good appetite, into the heaps of snow-white rice that were placed before him, and making his selection occasionally from the savoury smaller dishes which usually accompany a Persian breakfast. At length, having nearly satisfied himself, and turning his head towards his nephew, he drawled out, with a half tone of approbation, "It is you, is it?"

* From his youth he was known by the name of Baba Khan, an epithet of endearment given to him in the harem, although Fattedh Ali was his real name.

“ I am your sacrifice,” exclaimed the youth :
“ I am come to wish you good fortune in your day’s hunt, and to seek your permission that I be one of your *gholams* (slaves) to-day ?”

“ Be it so,” said the monarch ; “ but recollect, to-morrow you are dismissed from the presence, and you proceed to your government. Fars and the shores of our southern empire require the presence of an active chief. You are young, boy ! your beard has scarcely sprouted ; but you are now called upon to be of use to the state. But open your eyes, Baba Khan ! if the Shah hears complaints from his rayats and peasantry, you will find him seated on your *muznud* at Shiraz, before you can twist those ringlets of yours. Hunt to-day, nevertheless ; but be ready for my dismissal and your journey ere the day dawns to-morrow.”

Upon this, with the same graceful inclination of the head, the young Prince retreated ; and with a blithe air and tripping step he left the presence of his uncle, to prepare himself and equipages for the day’s sport, and for his subsequent journey. When he had left the presence, a graver personage was seen making his *selam*

at a distance, as soon as he had caught a glimpse of the royal person, clad in his dress of ceremony, shawl round his cap, brocade cloak and stockings of red cloth to his feet. This was the Sadr Azem, or the Grand Vizir, the most profound statesman, after his master, whom the East had known for centuries, who knew how far to go, and where to stop, both in language and proceedings, in the direction of the difficult and wayward character of his master.

Hajji Ibrahim Khan, or "the Hajji" simply, as he was known throughout Persia, was in fact a man of the most humane, beneficent, and noble nature, and his great aim was to temper the violence and cruel disposition of his master, by every counteracting scheme which lay in his power ; at the same time to turn into proper channels for the glory and welfare of his country, the activity, the energy, the skill, and undaunted bravery of the strange mortal whom his country now called their King.

The Vizir was about making his usual prostration at the margin of the marble basin, when the King, as far as his naturally querulous voice would allow him, exclaimed good-humouredly,

“Come near, Hajji, come near; we appoint you our Vekeel during the following week that we hunt. I take Mirza Sheffi with me, who will communicate with you upon affairs of state.”

To this, the Vizir made an inclination of the head, and said, “I am your Majesty’s slave. My eye shall not slumber, nor my ear be shut, in order that the welfare of your Majesty’s kingdom may advance.”

“Are the requisite firmans for Baba Khan written?” said the Shah.

“All is ready for him. We have announced that he is allowed to wear the royal *jika** on a *Kai Kaous* crown and *bazubends*—that was I believe the *kalaat*,† as I am your sacrifice, with which your Majesty has invested him?”

“Yes,” said the King, “all that is very right: but what is of more importance, your nephew goes as his Vizir, and it is upon his wisdom we mainly depend. Baba Khan is

* The *jika* is an ornament of jewellery in the shape of a feather, worn on the head.

† *Kalaat*, a dress of honour.

young, and dress and frivolity will take up his thoughts, whilst the graver matters of state must be instilled into him by your relation. The whole arrangement is in your hands, Hajji: if all goes right, it will be your merit, but if otherwise, the consequences be upon your head."

Having dismissed the Vizir, he now completed his hunting attire, putting on his shalwars or riding-trowsers, binding his legs with proper bandages, and throwing over all his heavy bulgar boots. Then girding his sword by his side, the chief astrologer came in to say that the hour for departure was near at hand, and the King issued forth from his apartment. As he passed from the door of his inner retreat to the public parts of the palace, the cry of *Gitchin!** was heard to resound from the mouths of the heralds, and repeated throughout the whole building, when all the officers, from the Vizir to the meanest room, were seen hastening away in the greatest anxiety to their appointed posts.

* A Turkish word, implying go, or begone. It is the remains of Tartar ceremonial.

CHAPTER II

Cares sprout with the beard.

PERSIAN PROVERB.

IN the very grey of the morning, before objects could be well distinguished at fifty yards distance, when the shades of the high towers and turreted walls were alone enough to hide whatever might be at their base, a procession was seen to issue from the lofty porticoes of the royal palace of Tehran. The principal object consisted of a richly-equipped takhteravan, mysteriously curtained over with crimson cloth, embroidered in all its compartments with the royal insignia of Persia, (the sun rising behind the back of a lion couchant,) which covered a frame of gilded lattice-work. It was borne be-

tween two richly-caparisoned mules, whose housing of red cloth covered them almost entirely, whilst tassels of various colours hung about their heads. Other mules equally caparisoned were in attendance, that they might be exchanged at pleasure; and so steady were the paces into which they had been trained, that they travelled for days together without breaking into a trot. The litter was spread with the softest mattresses and cushions, that no accidental jolt might discompose the person within; and the great care which was shown in properly conducting it over the most easy paths, disclosed how important it was thought that the occupant should be treated with the highest consideration. This conveyance was closely surrounded by several women on horseback, some clad in crimson cloth cloaks, having the privilege of exposing their faces—for such is allowed to ladies of the royal household—and others clothed from head to foot in impenetrable veils of white muslin. Some three or four led horses, richly caparisoned, were marshalled at a certain distance in front, whilst mules bear-

ing rich yakdans or trunks were seen hastening onwards, distant from the line of march, the whole being marshalled by the royal eunuchs, who with loud shrill voices, and angry words and gestures, were casting about the eyes of watchfulness and suspicion, in order to discover any audacious trespasser who might have transgressed the awful corook. The whole was closed by the person of the Khajeh Bashi, or eunuch-in-chief, and a numerous suite, who were ready at the smallest signal to scour the country, and inflict immediate death on any unfortunate offender.

The mysterious individual who occupied the litter was no less a personage than the Princess Amima, niece of the King, whose charms we must for the present keep veiled from our reader, as they were in reality from all mortals, until they must of necessity be disclosed to him, and in the mean while we must allow the passage of the procession to produce that effect upon the country where the corook was proclaimed, which it always did, namely, fear and curiosity. How every man's heart beat with desire, as the con-

fused tread of the procession passed his gate! his imagination conjuring up to him, in the very name of the Banou, charms which none but a Houri of Paradise could possess! But again, it sank when he reflected how near he was to death, should his curiosity prompt him to protrude even the tip of his moustache through the chink of his fast-closed shutter, to steal a look! And when the procession issued into the open country, instead of passing through an industrious peasantry enlivening the fields, this awful order produced an untenanted wilderness; for even if one unlucky wight was seen, it was in the act of flying for his life, as if he were pursued by a plague, or fearing the influence of the pestilential simoom.

The old drawbridges creaked, as in succession the procession cleared first the ditch which immediately surrounds the Ark, and then that which encircles the town, and having once passed the fortification and got fairly into the sahara or plain, as the day dawned, the individuals who composed it got into better humour; the women began to talk and to show

off their horsemanship, and every thing promised a day of enjoyment,—emancipation from the confinement of the walls of the harem being alone one of the greatest delights which a Persian woman can enjoy.

We will leave this party, then, to bend its way towards the Bagh Shah, its resting-place for that night, and turn to where the King himself was making his exit from the public gate and avenues of the palace and city.

No sooner had the cry of “Gitchin !” been heard throughout the Ark, than the commotion was general. The train of led horses, each with their respective grooms, were collected in front of the palace ; the running-footmen were in attendance ; all the gang of pipe-trimmers, shoe-bearers, cloak-bearers, spear-carriers, and the innumerable tribe of minor officers and courtiers attendant on the court, were there. Then the mounted guard of gholams, consisting of young men of rank, equipped in the most gallant style, and mounted on the most magnificent horses, either Arabian or Turcoman, were collected in a body. In another place

were the Mirzas and men of the pen who composed the King's travelling secretary-of-state's office ; whilst the heralds and chief executioner's officers were seen in all parts marshalling the procession, keeping the crowd at a distance, and opening the avenues through which the brilliant cortege was to pass. The hunting equipages had already proceeded under the superintendence of the huntsmen and dog-keepers, whilst some of the most famous hawks were kept in attendance, perched upon the wrist of their respective keepers, hoodwinked and noosed, as they were occasionally called for and admired by the King, who was particularly fond of the sport which they afforded.

It would be difficult perhaps to give an adequate idea of the congregated mass that was in readiness awaiting the presence of the King. It wore an appearance partaking more of the character of a military expedition than one purely for pleasure ; particularly as in the collected crowd were to be seen a body of two hundred camels, called *Zamburek*, each bearing a small swivel gun on its back, to be fired as

the royal foot touched the royal stirrup. Indeed the King was always anxious to keep up a military spirit among his people, and he never stirred without being surrounded by every emblem of that state, always showing himself ready, on the very first emergency, to march to any given point in the vast empire over which he governed.

The Shah, having left his inner apartments, proceeded through ranks of musqueteers to the principal gate of the palace, where his horse was in readiness. He walked with a slow and solemn step, receiving the salutations of every one on his passage, until he came to a lane formed by the vizirs, the great secretaries of state, the chief executioner, the governor of the city, the chief mollah with a congregation of priests, and a great body of courtiers, who all by their looks of profound respect showed the awe in which they stood of the dreaded mortal who was passing before them. It is impossible to describe the expression of the face upon which the eyes of all present were turned; for, bereft as it was of its native manliness, all that could be read in it was distrust, envy, and

hatred. He stopped to give his last order to the Grand Vizir, and then turning to his nephew, who had joined him, he ordered him to mount. As he approached his own horse, he found the astrologer royal ready with his watch to give him the true time for touching his foot with the stirrup, and then, by the assistance of his Shatir Bashi, who placed his hand under his arm, he vaulted into the saddle. At that moment, the discharge of the two hundred swivels from the camel-artillery was heard, the great band of the nokara, consisting of drums and cymbals and hautbois, began to play, and there was a shout of laudatory exclamations and prayers from those around.

As the King advanced, every thing immediately was put into motion, and gradually the condensed mass of men and animals, which completely filled and encumbered the great square before the palace, melted away, and was seen winding onwards, in one long interminable line, through the plain towards the eastern mountains. The great stirring cause, the one object, the Shah, in short, was to be seen dis-

tinctly separate from the great mass, a speck on the plain, infusing dread and apprehension in every eye that ventured to look at him. The heralds opened the procession. Then came the yedeks, or led horses—the choicest of their species, the pride of Arabia and Turcomania, caparisoned in the most beautiful manner, each caparison consisting of distinct sets of precious stones. To these succeeded a band of officers of etiquette, headed by the principal master of the ceremonies, who received petitions, or heard whatever supplicants might have to say, and then reported to the King in person. After this followed a suite of fantastically-dressed shatirs or running-footmen, two by two, each swinging a small stick in his hand, and distinguished by their light and agile persons. The head of these, an officer of considerable importance, walked close to the King's stirrup; whilst the King himself, otherwise totally unsurrounded, seemed to retain his exclusiveness from all the rest of God's creatures. The great mass of the procession was situated behind the person of the King. In front rode the Prince Fatteh

Ali, conspicuous by the ease and grace of his person, his magnificent costume, the brilliancy of his arms, and unrivalled beauty of his horse. Then came the Mastofis, or secretaries — the king's story-teller — his principal singer — numerous servants, and, last of all, a dense body of his gholams, or body-guard, all mounted on horses picked from the best of Persia's breed.

This procession held good until it had advanced about a parasang from the walls of the city, when some returned, and others proceeded straight to the halting-place at night; whilst the King, accompanied by his hunting-equipage alone, took the direction of the appointed sporting country.

On passing a limb of the chain of hills which takes its direction from the great cone of Demawend, the sportsmen entered upon a small plain, in the immediate entrance of which the chief huntsman had taken post with his dogs, and as the royal procession advanced he flung himself from his horse, and making the usual low inclination of the body, gave the information he had acquired concerning the game. He

proposed first to pass an hour of the morning in hawking the red-legged partridge among the rocky crests of the hills; and, as the sun acquired strength, to seek the wild ass deeper in the recesses of the mountains, where he had posted several relays of dogs, entrusted to the care of experienced peasants.

This being acceded to, the Shah immediately called for his favourite hawk, a native of the *germeseer*, or hot countries, which took a post upon the royal wrist, the eye of the animal being almost eclipsed by the superior animation of that of the man. The young Prince was allowed to manage and fly a hawk: a favoured few also took possession of hawks, but none dared venture to cross the King's path, or to hazard a flight in his direction. The sport began with the greatest success; and he who, a few minutes before, was, as it were, stiffened into all the dignity and exclusiveness of Majesty, was now seen throwing himself headlong into the chase with all the eagerness of a schoolboy. The hills and the plain now resounded with cries: in one place was the hawksman, with his head erect, tracing

through the air the progress of his bird, which he had just slipped in pursuit of some frightened object of game; in another, was seen a sportsman, hawk on wrist, riding at the greatest speed of his horse to where he expected a start; and again, on the pinnacle of some far-away rock, might be discerned the intelligent hawksman calling back his truant-bird by the well-known cry peculiar to him, or waving in the air the decoy, to entice him back to his perch. Through all these different gradations of the sport did the tyrant of Persia pass, during the one or two hours that it lasted; and when at length his huntsman in chief announced that it was time to seek for nobler sport, he retreated to another horse, which was now in waiting for him; whilst the gholams were sent in pursuit of the stragglers, to draw them again into their respective places near the royal person.

The young Prince, enlivened with the sport, returned to the Shah with an animated countenance, warmed with the glow of health and freshness, and gave an account of the share he had taken in the diversion. His success had

been great ; and, with the unsuspecting confidence of youth, he was summing up the result of his feats, when he was checked by a look of disapprobation from the despot, who, even in such minor acts of prowess, could not endure the smallest competition with himself, either real or imagined.

“ Wait, boy !” said the Shah ; “ wait until we get into the mountains. The wild ass is even more daring than the partridge in his excursions, and he will make your young heart leap in your mouth, as he takes you over rocks which no horse can dare to ascend, or by the brink of precipices where no hoof can venture to tread.”

Fatteh Ali heard this with no other emotion than the desire of being carried thither, and only grasped the tighter the light and elastic spear, made of the India bamboo, and tipped with the most perfectly worked steel, which he now held in his hand, or looked towards his gun-bearer, to see that the flint and the priming of his rifle were in good order.

Having advanced well into the recesses of the

mountains, which reared their rude crests ever and anon into the most fantastic shapes, apparently forbidding the horseman's approach or appalling his audacity, at length a cry was heard, loud and shrill, repeated from different stations on the rocks, "Goor khur! Goor khur! The ass!—the wild ass!" And, sure enough, some two or three of these beautiful and independent animals were seen quietly feeding in the very bottom of a deep ravine, apparently unmindful of their surrounding assailants. The old chief of the hunt came up in breathless haste, this time regardless of all ceremony, to where the Shah was posted, to inform him of the fact, and to point whither it ought to be their object to drive the game, in order that it might fall in with the different relays of dogs which had been posted in the mountains, and without which it would be in vain to attempt to tire the almost unconquerable activity and bottom of these beasts. The Shah immediately yielded a quick and eager assent, and without loss of time rode in the prescribed direction.

With great wariness and skill, the huntsman got the wind of the game, and then, being within two or three hundred yards of them, slipped from the couples two of the swiftest and strongest greyhounds. The beasts no sooner heard the noise of the hunt, than, with head and ears erect, crest up, snorting aloud the nervousness of their activity, they bounded off a few paces—then stopped—then bounded a few more—stopped, and turned front on their pursuers, when, as if disdaining all pursuit, they allowed the dogs to approach within a few yards, and then darted off at a speed which left imagination far behind. Having gained an immense advance, as in derision of their pursuers, they stopped, and even fed; when the same flight was again repeated, and again terminated with success. It was now that the well-known prowess of the Persian horsemen might be remarked: no ascent, however steep, no descent, however rapid, seemed to stop them, but urging their bold and sure-footed horses over every impediment, they kept way with the dogs, in a manner that no one could

believe who had not seen them. Among the foremost of these rode the King himself, with eager eye, in the direction of the chase, bearing in one hand his Georgian gun, and with the other directing his horse, with a quickness and dexterity worthy of a mountain chief. Close to the royal person rode the young Prince his nephew, reckless of every danger, only anxious to be foremost, and distressed that he might not precede his uncle. He also had taken his gun in hand ; for as the chase had now ascended to the rocky summits, he might have a better chance of bringing down his game with it than with his spear, which could only be used in the plain. The Goors had now been chased by two relays of dogs, and still no symptoms of lassitude or faintness were seen ; they had carried their pursuers to the very summit of the most stupendous heights, near to which only some three or four horsemen had ventured to pursue them : the rest either remained behind, or were toiling up the rocks and ravines ; but still the ground was so disposed, that the whole scene was kept in full view by all the party. A suspension of all

exertion seemed to have taken place, when a quadruped was seen to take post on the very apex of a triangular rock, which formed the summit of the highest mountain, cutting the blue sky with its form. At that moment a shot was fired—the animal still kept its post; a second after, another was discharged—and lo! down it fell from its proud height, falling prone into a yawning precipice, and bounding from rock to rock, from projection to projection, until it alighted almost at the very feet of the Shah himself. An universal shout of approbation from a thousand uplifted voices was immediately heard, which resounded in a thousand echoes through the deep recesses of the mountains. But well would it have been for him who fired the shot, who excited the admiration, whose heart bounded with delight, if he had never fired it! It raised a storm that produced immediate effects, and which threatened to overwhelm him with destruction. The tyrant fired the first shot; the youthful Prince the second. As soon as the successful result of it was seen, the envy and rage of the eunuch at once

started into active passion. Turning sharp round, with a face beaming with wickedness, he exclaimed, “ Who was that ? What burnt soul dared to perform that feat ? ” Fattedh Ali, with his head down, his arms just supporting his drooping gun, and altogether deprived of his exultation, confessed himself the culprit by his silence — he said nothing, but trusted to the heedless ardour of his delight, to make his best defence.

But to trust to the generosity of one who had none in his soul, was to grasp at a straw. It was well indeed that instant death had not been the reward of his temerity ; but disgrace, or intended disgrace, was the result. The gallant youth was instantly ordered from the field, and told to proceed at once to the night’s resting-place, there to wait the King’s further pleasure.

With the excited anger of the tyrant fell his eagerness for the sport. His mind became the prey of every little hate and spite ; and he would perhaps have sacrificed the promoter of it to his ill-humour, had he possessed any other

relative to whom he might look for perpetuating his race, and the dynasty which he might almost be said to have established. He was obliged to swallow his spleen ; and as he descended from the mountains, he entered into conversation with some of his surrounding courtiers, who, well knowing the temper and character of the man, managed by their flattering and appropriate speeches to restore him to a better frame of mind. But still the King was not satisfied that the prince his nephew should leave him to take possession of his important government, without receiving some lasting and impressive lesson of the dependence in which he was placed, and of the awful consequences of the smallest deviation from that path which it would be his duty to pursue.

Having reached the encampment at the Bagh Shah, he inquired what had become of the Prince, when he was informed that he had some time since reached his own tent ; and that he was now passing his evening at a small distance with his youthful companions and servants, firing at a target with ball. Nothing cer-

tainly could have been worse selected than this amusement, at this particular moment ; and accordingly the very mention of it brought out the whole of the King's rage. “ *Ahi, Badbakht !* Oh, the ill-favoured youth !” exclaimed he, “ when will his folly cease ? Is it not enough that he should have bearded me to my nose this very morning ? and now he wishes to proclaim my defeat to the whole camp by reminding them at every shot of his victory. Go, bring him here instantly,” he exclaimed to his trusty attendant Sadek ; “ go, take him into my private tent ; let no one, on pain of death, be near ; but in the mean while send hither the Humpback.”

Sadek immediately departed in search of the young Prince ; and the barber stood before his master.

“ Place *the* box under the pillow in the tent of secrecy,” said he to his unearthly-looking domestic.

The imp, seeing the state of things from the contortion on his master's brow, merely said, “ *Be cheshm !* by my eyes !” and took his leave.

The King then leaving his own large tent,

where he had been seated since his return from the hunt, went into an adjoining smaller one, which he used for secret conferences, and which it would be instant death for any one to approach within hearing distance. Fatteh Ali was in the very act of firing off his last discharge at the target, when Sadek approached to request his attendance before the King. His indiscretion then immediately struck him ; and ordering his followers to desist from further practice, straightway he proceeded to the interview. The day had now completely closed, and two tapers were about being introduced, when Fatteh Ali stepped in, and there discovered his uncle seated in a corner, not unlike a venomous snake coiled up within itself, ready to dart upon its unsuspecting prey. This face-to-face interview at first staggered him, but conscious of no offence, in all the innocence and confidence of youth, he presented himself as if nothing of importance had occurred.

“ Fatteh Ali,” said the Shah, in no very agreeable-toned voice, “ sit !” This was an unheard-of privilege ; however, in obedience he

sat down. “Fatteh Ali,” repeated the King, with a strangely solemn air, “You are young—you are heedless, ’tis true; but young and heedless as you are, you must be taught that if you once lose respect for those to whom respect is due, you may in time commit acts of the most reprehensible nature—acts which, if not rebellious, may border on rebellion, and leave me, your lord and master, no other alternative than that of depriving you of the power of so doing.”

“For the love of the Prophet! for the love of Ali!” exclaimed Fatteh Ali, “what words are these? I am your sacrifice, my uncle! Whose dog am I, that should think of rebellion? By your sacred head, by your salt which I have so long eaten, I was carried away by the ardour of the chase in what I did to-day—had I known that you would have been displeased, I would rather have cut my finger off than pulled that ill-fated trigger;—pardon—oh pardon!”

“All this is very well, Fatteh Ali! but before we part, I have something of importance to communicate to you. Prepare yourself for a sight which will require all your fortitude to be-

hold—this is no child's play—the King is in earnest.” And saying this, he drew forth a small though strongly-secured box, at which he looked with an expression of malignity and mystery that no pen can describe ; and applying a key to the padlock with which it was closed, drew forth a parcel wrapped in a silken handkerchief.

Fatteh Ali expected at least some gem of value, or some curiosity, precious from the manner in which it was preserved. His impatience was excited to the utmost, when wrapper succeeded wrapper, and still nothing appeared that in the least came up to his expectation. It might be a choice Koran, which on his departure his uncle might be anxious to give him, knowing how careful he was to let the world understand that he was a zealous promoter of his religion, and one of the holy Prophet's most devoted sons. But no—the inside package had no appearance of any thing so substantial. Or it might possibly be the *jika*, the ornamented jewel to wear on the head, the ensign of royalty, which now that he was about more closely to represent Majesty in his new government, his

uncle might be inclined to give him with his own hands—this too did not appear to be the object of so much care. The Shah paused as he came to the last wrapper. It evidently was no gift—kindness and generosity had nothing to do with the operation—the face of the actor bespoke neither—on the contrary, it bespoke passions of the most angry nature. At length, at one effort, the Shah pulled off the last covering; but what was the youth's horror and surprise, instead of a splendid gift, to see an old handkerchief clotted with blood, displayed before his eyes !*

“Do you see this?” said the King, as he deliberately unfolded the abominable rag, his face at the same time taking an expression which would have appalled even a demon. Fattah Ali, with fixed muscles and blanched cheeks, stared wildly at the horrid exposure.

“Boy,” said the King, with increased earnestness, “does not this blood speak?” Fattah Ali could only answer with looks of astonish-

* This fact was related to the author by the late Grand Vizir, Mirza Sheffi.

ment. "Speak, boy," said the tyrant, "do you know this?"

"God forgive me!" he answered, the words almost choking his utterance, "I know nothing of blood!"

"Ill-fated that thou art," exclaimed the Shah, "this blood is the blood of thy father!"

At this a deadly hue overspread the cheeks of the sensitive youth, and a tremor convulsed his frame. "My father!" he exclaimed.

"Ay, thy father," said the despot, "and my brother! He was amiable like thyself, therefore I loved him; he was thoughtless and heedless like you—I suspected him; he became ambitious and rebellious, therefore I slew him! There, go!—thou knowest the worst—thou knowest me—remember this night's lesson. As I acted towards the father, so will I act towards the son. As I treated my brother, so will I treat my nephew. Go! you are dismissed—ponder deeply on this—and ere to-morrow's dawn be you on your road to Shiraz."

During this speech, this victim of passion had exhibited symptoms of the profound-

est feeling. As he described the love he bore his brother, tears, actual tears, sprang from sources which had seldom known such weakness, and gave an indescribable expression of blended softness and harshness to a countenance which long habit had imprinted with nothing but the most uncompromising sternness. But he soon recovered himself—this transient gleam of the truth of nature's feelings was quickly overclouded, and the youth, in looking up at his uncle's face, could discover nothing but its own usual impenetrable gloom. A long silence ensued. The astounded youth swelled with every conflicting emotion ; unprepared as he was for such a disclosure, his whole being appeared to be struck by imbecility—he would have spoken, but words stuck in his throat. At last he rose to go, but overcome by the misery of his situation, he said,

“ And am I thus to leave you, without one soft word ? Recollect I am fatherless—my only hope is in God and you. Amima and I are orphans – we are the creatures of your bounty—we live by your countenance, and are less

than the dust of the field, if you deprive us of it !”

The appeal to the name of Amima produced a change in the countenance of the eunuch ; but still the excitement which he had just undergone preserved the mastery, and he was no otherwise softened by the humility of his nephew than by saying, “ As long as you behave properly, boy, you will have nothing left to desire from me. The King knows how to reward his servants.”

“ If then your slave is thus to be dismissed, let your nephew ask one favour of his uncle. For the love of the Prophet, let him be permitted to see his sister before he goes.* Allow me, for the last time, boy that I still am, to see my Amima before she be for ever excluded from the gaze of man. I am sure in this we can neither transgress against the ordinances of the Prophet, nor the usages of the strictest sons of Islam.”

“ Boy, what do you ask ?” said the Shah.

* Sisters are seldom allowed to see their brothers in the harem, after they have passed the age of boyhood.

“ Do not you know, that your sister is the Banou, the chief of my Anderoon ? She should not be allowed to see even her father, much less a madman like you. It cannot be face to face.”

“ Be it then, O my uncle ! behind a curtain ; or let her be veiled. I wish once more to hear the sound of her voice before we part for ever.”

There was evident agitation in the mind of the Shah at this request of his nephew. His jealousy, that never-failing attendant upon a creature constituted as this man was, had taken fire ; but still his love for his niece was ardent, and allowing the youth to depart without an interview, and forbidding him any access to her, he was conscious would be a proceeding so afflicting, that he began to fear it might be visited upon himself in bitter upbraiding. He therefore yielded a tardy and unwilling assent to Fattah Ali's request, saying that he should immediately be conducted to her dwelling, but that the interview must take place in the presence of the chief eunuch, who would report all that passed, and that, on

pain of his displeasure, it should not last longer than a certain number of minutes.

Fatteh Ali willingly agreed to any arrangement that might bring him into communication with one he loved so dearly as his sister, and was preparing to leave the presence, when the Shah, calling him close, and with eyes speaking daggers, said,

“ If one word of what you have now seen or heard transpires, know, boy ! that instant I am no longer your uncle, and you die.”

The youth scarcely knew whether he was awake or asleep at these words ; and bewildered by what had taken place, he mechanically made his accustomed salutation, and took his leave, to wait without the tent until he should be conducted to his sister.

He had not waited long before the Khajeh Bashi came to him, and, preceded by several large lanterns, they took their way to where the royal women were lodged. Every demonstration of respect was paid to the presumed heir apparent : of that there was no lack ; indeed, the difficulty was how to restrain it with-

in proper bounds, so much was it feared to excite the jealousy of the actual King. Fatteh Ali therefore requested to be conducted in the most private manner possible. The harem had been placed within the garden, which is inclosed by high walls, at the gate of which the Prince stopped for a short time, until his conductor went in to make some previous arrangement, and then returned.

The Prince was introduced into a small room, carpeted with travelling furniture, which communicated with another by a door, over which was suspended a silk curtain. The Khajeh came in after a few minutes' waiting, and making his lowest obeisance, said, pointing to the curtain, "Bismillah ! in the name of God ! the Banou waits." Upon which Fatteh Ali sprang to the spot, and exclaimed with the greatest animation,

"Amima !"

"Are you Fatteh Ali?" said a most beautiful voice, the silvery tones of which at once went to the heart.

"Are you my own sister? my Amima?"

"And you my brother?"

“Curse on the rapidity of time, which has made me the youth I am, and debarred me of the pleasure of seeing you. Those dear, dear days when we were inseparable companions are gone by, and now we live in the world unknown to each other.”

“But not unthought of, Fattah Ali. Your image is never from my mind. I love you more than ever. But we must submit to the laws, and moreover to the Shah’s wish. In thought let us exist for each other; but not otherwise. We are not like the infidels, who allow of the gaze of man on woman.”

“Far be it from me, Amima, to think otherwise. But I am about to leave you. We may never meet again. Where will you ever find another brother, if you lose me? and where shall I ever find another sister?”

“Yes, my brother!” exclaimed the beautiful and mysterious voice, “I have heard of your destiny. Let us be resigned to the decrees of God! Allah is great! Allah is merciful! Let us but do our duty, and all will be right. You are now growing to man’s estate; your thoughts, your sword, your services, are now due to the King and

your country. Your sister, Inshallah! will hear that you are become a personage, and she will ever put up her prayers to the holy Prophet for your safety." The curtain was slightly agitated at these words, as if some one behind it had deeply sighed, and they produced such an effect upon the youth, that he would have sprung forward, and clasped his sister in his arms, but for the presence of the Khajeh, so much did his heart require some mode of expanding his feelings, agitated and worked upon as they had been by what had passed in the King's presence.

"You are my consolation, my hope, my every thing in this world. We are orphans, Amima; we have lost—" He would have said "a father," but he checked himself as he looked towards the Khajeh. "We must never forget each other. And if ever the day should come that Amima should want a protector, let her look to Fattah Ali. Her commands shall be law. Her enemies shall be his enemies, and her friends his friends."

The Khajeh now hinted that, according to the commands which he had received, the interview

must draw to a close ; and making his bow to the Prince, withdrew to give directions for the Prince's departure. Fattah Ali seized upon this precious moment with the swiftness of light : he drew the hand to him which he saw just touching the curtain, and, half throwing the hateful skreen from him, he embraced a form whose slight and graceful impress on the yielding silk bespoke every thing that the imagination can conceive of woman's loveliness. This was all he saw of his sister ; and as the guardian returned, they had only time to repeat their vows of brotherly and sisterly love, their determination to write to each other, and their injunction to watch over each other's safety.

The youth, overwhelmed with feelings of every sort — horror and dread of his uncle, love for his sister — dependent upon his uncle's will — called upon by duty to obey him as their king and benefactor, yet prompted by nature to hate and abhor him as the destroyer of their father, whatever might have been his delinquency — returned to his tents in no enviable mood ; but the feelings of youth, and

particularly of a Persian, whose characteristic is volatility, are but transient, and when he turned to his prospects for the future, to his journey on the morrow, which would remove him from his uncle, and give him an independent scene of action, surrounded by every circumstance which could flatter his ambition and give full scope for the prosecution of his tastes, he gradually resumed his liveliness, and prepared for his departure. Indeed, so little inclined to sleep was he, that, after having spent some time in conversation with his future vizir and counsellor, he agreed that it would be in every way more expedient to follow the Shah's wishes to the letter, and to take the road towards Shiraz with the least possible delay. Accordingly immediate departure was determined upon. The tents were unpitched, the baggage was loaded, all the equipages were collected, and before the midnight watch had been set, Fattedh Ali was already on his road. He reached the seat of his government in the due course of time, and there we will leave him to grow up to manhood, until perchance our

narrative may bring him before our readers again, with his beard fully grown and his intellect more expanded. In the mean while we return to the Shah, and to the main objects of our narrative.

The first words he pronounced upon awaking the next day, were to inquire whether the Prince Fattah Ali had departed; and when he was informed that the dust of his last string of baggage-mules was but just perceptible on the horizon of the plain, and that ere this he must have reached his first stage, he seemed pleased, and immediately bestirred himself to enjoy an active day's sport on his road to Firouzkoh, where he intended to pass the ensuing week. The whole camp was in motion at an early hour. The harem took its usual departure before the rest of the court was on the stir; and as the second day's hunt was nearly similar to that which we have already related, without the catastrophe which put an end to it, we will spare our readers any further details upon the subject, and take them, without more delay, to the future scene of our narrative.

CHAPTER III.

Woman, veil thyself!—KORAN.

IN a direction about north-east from the city of Tehran, distant some twenty parasangs, is situated the small town, or rather large village of Firouzkoh. Its site is supposed to occupy that of some ancient city, and the name of Iskender, or Alexander, is mentioned as being the founder of certain buildings, evidently of great magnitude, on or about a sort of Acropolis situated near it. But it is more celebrated for being the frontier town to the wooded and forest-girt province of Mazanderan, and for its neighbourhood to passes through certain ridges and belts of rocky mountains, which have been celebrated, both in ancient and modern times, under the name of pylæ, or gates.

A chain of these mountains, taking a sweep to the westward, approach Firouzkoh within about three miles, and as they will be the scene of part of our immediate history, will require some more particular description.

The plain on which the village is situated extends itself, with some slight undulations, to the foot of a perpendicular wall, or curtain of rock, that runs in a straight line almost quite across it, and seems to bar any further progress to the traveller in that direction. Its elevation is so abrupt, that one might suppose its almighty Architect intended to exclude man from going farther, and to reserve it entirely for the habitation of the antelope and the mountain goat, with which the tract is overrun, were it not for one narrow pass or lane, formed by a perpendicular rent from top to base in the live rock, sufficiently wide for two horsemen to go abreast, and which, after winding about in an uncertain manner some two hundred yards, leads into a basin of narrow dimensions, surrounded on all sides by the same sort of rock. This is again perforated by

a similar channel, which is a little broader than the other, but more beautiful; for its sides appear to have been polished and prepared with great skill, although the hand of man has evidently not been employed upon them; whilst a stream of the purest water winds its way through a clean bed, partly rock and partly gravel, creating a fringe of the most refreshing verdure on its banks, and giving to the whole scene an appearance of careful ornamental cultivation. This avenue, which even in the hottest weather is deliciously cool, again leads into a basin similar to the first, excepting in its dimensions, which are considerably larger, the former being, as it were, the ante-room to the latter, which, in its relative proportion, might be called the saloon. From this opening there appears to be no outlet. The rocks rise perpendicularly around, whilst the surface, or the flooring, if we may so call it, is composed of a short tufted grass, which bends in crisp elasticity under the tread. No spot was ever better calculated for the purpose to which it was appropriated by the kings of

Persia, namely as a safe retreat for their harems; where their women, their wives, daughters, and female slaves, might roam about and take the air without apprehension from the gaze of man, or indeed of any living thing, save the antelopes and wild goats, which constantly, on the very crests of the rocks, peeped their heads over to survey the depths below.

It was in this spot that the Shah had ordered the pavilion of the Lady Amima to be erected; and never had a more luxurious combination of wood, canvass, and rich materials, been seen in Persia. Its outer walls of crimson stuff, richly embroidered, were spread to a vast extent, enclosing a garden and a basin of water, laid out with great skill and labour. The pavilion itself was erected on three poles, the fly or roof of which covered a large space, so that constant shade was thrown over the apartment which it contained; and this was lined with the most beautiful Cashmerian shawls, which had been worked on purpose in the looms of that country; the sides and walls had been perforated in devices like lace or trellis work, allowing the

smallest breeze free access within. The floor of this apartment, which had been raised some two feet from the level of the ground, was overlaid with carpets of the most beautiful colours and patterns, also manufactured at Cashmere, and presented nothing to the tread of an unshod foot but the softest and thickest wool, whilst thick *nummuds*, or felts, were profusely spread all round for seats. In the corner was a magnificent black velvet pillow, embroidered with small pearls at the two extremities, and terminated by tassels of larger pearls. Immediately before it a small fountain, refreshing the air, was made to throw up constant streams, the borders of which were ornamented by fresh flowers, and by a succession of fruits piled up in bowls.

The day had scarcely dawned, and the east was just lightly tinged with the beautiful crimson peculiar to Persian skies, when a female form was seen making the last prostration of the Mahomedan prayer in one corner of this pavilion, gracefully bending forward to kiss the sacred clay, and then returning to a kneeling

position ; whilst another was standing at a small distance in an attitude of solicitude and apparent interest, waiting until this pious act should be over. No pen could ever define the beauty, the bewitching air of innocence and dignity, which pervaded the whole person of the one who prayed. She was fast ripening into womanhood, but her form was almost infantine ; different from the generality of her countrywomen, she was fair—at least she might be so called where all are decidedly dark ; her hair, flowing down her back and over her temples in the greatest profusion, was brown, but rendered auburn by a slight tinge of *khenna** ; her skin was whiter, and of a more delicate texture, than that of the most refined Circassian ; and her eyes were of so dark a blue that they were occasionally taken for the usual black eye of the country, and being deeply set, possessed a double force of expression. Her movements were full of grace. There was an

* The *khenna* or *khna*, the orange die, so common throughout the East, which is imported into Persia from Arabia.

earnestness in every thing she said, which enhanced the value of each word, and gave her an appearance of sincerity unusual to her countrywomen. She was richly though simply dressed, in the costume of spring, that is, chiefly in shawls, which were disposed in folds round her person; whilst rows of buttons, each possessing a stone of value, drew tight to her shape the short but graceful vest which covered her body. Her head-dress was composed of a turban of shawl, of a round and picturesque form, two long tresses, after the fashion of Persia, falling from her temples in rich clusters nearly as low as the swell of her bosom. This fair creature was the Princess Amima, niece of the Shah, and sister to the Prince Fattah Ali. Possessing an almost unbounded sway over her uncle, she never took advantage of it but for the best of purposes, always tempering her zeal in favour of the unfortunate victims of his rage or ambition, by a wisdom and discretion beyond her years; and which, in fact, was the secret of her influence. She was almost adored as a saint

by the whole country, particularly by those who immediately surrounded the person of the monarch ; for when any of them incurred his displeasure, they always had recourse to her good offices, and she seldom failed in restoring them to favour. This young creature, as indeed all Persian girls do, had lived in such total seclusion from the world, that she had never spoken to man save her uncle, her brother, and the attendants of the seraglio, and consequently her heart had never known any stronger emotion of affection than for one or two of her own sex. Her mother had died when she was very young ; her father, as we have seen, was said to have fallen a victim to his own ambition, and to the vindictive rage or policy of her uncle ; and excepting an old nurse, whom she always called Dedeh, and her companion or waiting-maid Mariam, both of whom she loved with the greatest affection, she had no attachments.

It was Mariam who was in the tent, watching her mistress as she prayed. She was about ten years older, and was as dark as her mis-

tress was fair ; with strong-marked features, eyes full of fire, arched eyebrows, and hair of raven black. She was sister to Sadek, the Shah's valet, and acted towards her mistress more as a companion than a servant, being the confidant of all her feelings, and a partaker of her joys as well as her griefs.

Amima, rising from her last prostration, exhibited in her beautiful countenance an expression of the tenderest feeling. " I have thought of nothing but my dear Fattedh Ali," said she to Mariam, " during my prayers. May God be with him, wherever he goes !" said she in a sort of mental exclamation.

Mariam said, " God grant him health and strength, as well for your sake as for that of Persia ! A wonderful great king will he make, if he imitates in the smallest degree the virtues of his sister !"

" My soul Mariam," said Amima, " do not throw words into the air ! Who am I compared to Fattedh Ali ? I do not like flattery : I have told you so a thousand times. Whatever I am, so let me be. I will address myself to

Allah, and say with Ferdousi, ‘Whatever I am, ’tis thou that hast made me.’ But let us not lose the cool of this beautiful morning,” said she in a livelier tone; “let us make a survey of this curious and wonderful place; let us take advantage of the liberty which the King has given us, to walk about unaccompanied by our usual guardians, and without the precautions which usually surround us.”

“Yes, yes, my Khanum!” exclaimed her attendant. “Oh! let us be as the infidel women are said to be, for the time we are here. ’Tis true, there is nothing to look at us, save the wild beasts who peer at us from the summit of the rocks; but even that is something new.”

“You speak of infidel women,” said the young princess, “as if you envied the liberty they enjoy. I fear, Mariam, you read your Koran to little purpose. Young as I am, I know that there can be no greater crime than for a woman to show her face to a man, therefore let us take a veil, lest such a misfortune should happen.”

Saying this, the two maidens quitted the tent, and bent their steps at random, uncertain as to the direction they would take.

“We are really like mice in a cage,” exclaimed Mariam, as she surveyed the rocks which surrounded them. “We might try to get out, but it would be in vain; for, excepting at the entrance on the other side, where the guards are posted, there does not seem to be a hole to put one’s head into.”

“No,” said the Princess, “never was there ever seen a more complete Anderoon than this; ’tis one of the stupendous works of Allah! See, the rocks rise round us like a *serperdeh*.”*

“In truth yes,” said Mariam, “you said it well, my Khanum! But let us walk close at their base; we may find some flower that we have never before seen!” Upon which they took their way near the root of the rocks, admiring their height, and exclaiming at their strange conformation. As they proceeded they came to a small projection, within which they

* The *serperdeh* is the wall of canvass which surrounds the royal tents.

observed a very narrow pass which had been hidden from their view, the rocks lapping over each other like the folds of an Indian skreen, and keeping that hidden which could only be seen by a near approach.

“Wonderful, wonderful!” exclaimed Mariam, “let us go on, my Khanum! let us go this way.”—Amima was lost in admiration at what she saw. The rocks were cleft as if by one blow from some supernatural hand, and so narrow was the passage, that it was scarcely lighted by the dim ray from above which pierced through it.

Without hesitation they proceeded to explore what they at first took for a cavity. As they advanced, the passage continued to wind onwards, until it stopped almost abruptly; but there was a narrow part of the rocks, which had been formed by nature, and adopted as a path by the wild goats, into an easy ascent, and which gradually led from the intricacy of the channel into some more open space.

At first the maidens, as shy as the antelopes themselves, seemed uncertain whether they

should proceed, but, taking courage from the total seclusion of the scene, and impelled by their natural eagerness and curiosity, they ventured to ascend, turning their eyes upwards, with looks full of interest, towards the perpendicular rocks overhead, which opened new forms to their view at each step they took. As they ascended, they found their path bordered with mountain flowers, which, as they gathered, invited them onwards: they now saw more of the blue sky, and at length stepping over a huge rock, which had appeared to overhang their heads from the lowermost point of their path, they at once stood upon an eminence which overlooked an immense range of wild and savage country. In the extreme distance were seen the crests of the forest-trees, which in one deep and impenetrable mass clothed the sides of the mountains that surround the Caspian Sea and form the boundaries of the province of Mazanderan. A wild intermixture of low wood, rock, soil, and broken country took up the intermediate space, comprising a chase celebrated throughout Persia for the

variety of wild animals with which it abounds, and a well-known resort of its kings for the purposes of hunting. The majestic and snow-capped cone of Demawend was seen to the westward, stretching its beautiful lines of ascent into the intervening lines of other surrounding mountains, and gave at once a character of grandeur, to what without it would be a dreary chilling waste. No sound was heard save the shrill note of the hawk, or occasionally, high in air, the heavy cry of the eagle, which might be seen winding in graceful circles its descent upon its prey. All nature was hushed; the first rays of the sun were darting across the wilderness, touching the angles of abrupt mountains, and tinging with red the snows on the great mountain's cone.

The maidens, who had never before found themselves in so lone and unprotected a situation, remained awe-struck at the view before them, and scarcely ventured to address each other. They appeared to stand alone on the surface of the world. Their beautiful forms, sole tenants, as it were, of the wilderness, would

have made a subject worthy of a painter's skill, backed by the beautiful and dazzling light that was gradually developing every object in the great landscape before them.

Mariam at length found courage to speak. "Let us proceed, in the name of the Prophet! O my Khanum—such a place was never seen before—surely our fortune is great!"

"Stop," exclaimed Amima, with timidity in her accent, "are we right in proceeding thus far? This is beyond our limits."

"Only let us advance to yonder rock," said the confidant, "and then we will retrace our steps. We shall certainly see strange sights from it."

They proceeded cautiously about a hundred yards farther to a rock which held a conspicuous place in the foreground, and which by its projecting top would seem to afford shelter from the sun as well as the night air. They had scarcely turned an abrupt angle, when they heard, or thought they heard, the growl of a dog. Advancing a few steps, their apprehensions were realized; for they not only

heard the bark distinctly, but saw a dog rise from the ground, where it had been lying, and, almost immediately after, a man's form extended on the ground, apparently asleep. A hawk, hoodwinked, was perched immediately over him.

The first impulse of both the maidens was to make a rapid retreat ; but the bark of the dog having awakened the man, he immediately arose and advanced towards them. There was now no escape, for he was so close that the attempt would have been useless, and, as both his air and manner inspired confidence, they allowed him to approach. Amima, after recovering from her fright, covered herself with her veil, though not before he had fully gazed upon her face ; Mariam was too much pleased with the appearance of the stranger to feel unhappy at his looks. He was, in fact, a youth of the most prepossessing appearance. His shape was that of great manliness, agility, and strength ; the breadth of his shoulders showed to advantage the slimness of his waist, his whole frame being poised most symmetrically upon

legs formed as though they had been sculptured. His face, made up of features cast in a mould of great regularity, and animated by the expression of sense and goodness, would have been at all times his best introduction; but in this instance they produced so magical an effect, that fear gave way to confidence, and suspicion to good-will. He was dressed in the costume of Mazanderan. His cap was placed on the side of his head, with hair in curl behind the ears; a short vest fitted tight to his body by a belt, and descended to his knees; a dagger was on his thigh, and a staff in his hand; a small hatchet was inserted within his girdle.

With looks full of deference he approached the Princess and her attendant, and said, in the softest accent, "Be not in fear of me; I am your slave: tell me, as you fear Allah, where I am, in order that I may retrace my steps homeward. I have lost my way—benighted as I was at the close of yesterday, I passed the night under this rock, and now know not where I am."

“ Who are you, sir ?” said Amima. “ How came you here ?”

“ I am a stranger,” answered the youth. “ I am from Mazanderan.”

“ But have you not heard of the corook ? Do not you know that there is death in the spot upon which you stand ?”

“ Corook ! what corook !” exclaimed he ; “ I am ignorant of every thing. I was hunting with my hawks yesterday, when this bird flew from me, and, as he is a great favourite, I pursued him until night-fall.” He spoke in a hurried and perplexed manner, for his eyes were riveted on the beautiful form before him in a manner so intense, and with looks so full of admiration, that he scarcely knew how to express himself. “ But where am I ? before whom do I stand ? My head becomes dizzy.”

“ Fly, stranger, whoever you be,” said Amima ; “ should you be seen here, certain and instant death would be your fate.”

“ But we must find the way to Mazanderan for him,” said Mariam, who did not seem anxious to dismiss him quite so soon.

“ May heaven pour blessings on your head,” said he, addressing Mariam, “ for those words ! Be the consequences what they may, in pity permit one whose eyes are fascinated, to enjoy their fascination. Tell me, lady ! by what happiest of events have I, one so little deserving of doing homage to the angel before me, been thus thrown on your path ? ”

“ The knowledge you require would only make you more certain of the danger of your situation, should you unfortunately fall into my uncle’s hands.”

“ Your uncle ! ” exclaimed the youth, in accents of the profoundest respect. “ Is the Shah, indeed, so nigh at hand ! O forgive my presumption ! Let me kiss the print of your footsteps, and let me no longer transgress your orders.”

It was plain that both our hero and our heroine, by this casual rencontre, had fallen at once into feelings of great mutual admiration. She longed to know his history, for his air bespoke one of noble parentage, and he could

only desire to enjoy the delight of gazing on the unequalled charmer before him.

He was about taking a reluctant departure, when Mariam, diving into the mind of her mistress, said to him, "Take every precaution in leaving us; it is possible that you may meet the Shah and his numerous hunting equipages, and the Princess Amima, whom you see here, fears that you might be molested; but before you go, tell us who you are."

The youth, still with hesitation on his lips, and admiration and astonishment in his whole manner, was about to answer, when suddenly an antelope bounded by, apparently sorely pressed by huntsmen, and shortly after the trampling of horses' hoofs was heard, with the shouts of huntsmen. Several shots were then fired in the direction in which the trio stood. The interruption was so unexpected, so sudden, that the youth had scarcely time to throw himself before the Princess, to skreen her from harm, when a horseman on full speed, passing the angle of the rock beforementioned, forgot

his chase as he discovered them, and stopped by one vigorous effort on his horse's rein. The consternation which seized Amima and her attendant, on discovering who it was, was so great, that it deprived them of all power of speech and action; and half fainting, half dragging themselves along, they hid themselves, like frightened birds before the hawk, behind the rock, which effectually skreened them from the gaze of the men. The youth, in the meanwhile, having very soon discovered the peril of his situation, and before whom he now stood, (for it was the Shah himself,) drew up to his full height, and put himself in an attitude, which, while it bespoke his independence, at the same time announced his determination to defend himself. The first impulse of the King was immediately to cry out with all his might to his attendants, "Seize him—slay him!" and immediately the foremost, dismounting from their horses, ran to put his orders into execution. As they approached their victim, he said, "Keep off, in the name of the Prophet keep off!" Again the King exclaimed, "Sons

of dogs ! why do you delay ? what news is this ? whose dog is this ? *bekoush ! bekoush !* kill, kill !”

Several more of the attendants coming up, sword in hand, and the youth finding that there was no chance of escape, for his assailants had now completely hemmed him in on every side, exclaimed with a loud voice, “Avaunt ! desist ! I am Zohrab !”

This name acted like a spell upon those who heard it. The King himself was now as anxious to save as he had been to destroy the stranger, and ordered a cessation of the attack with as much vociferation as he had before urged it on. Every mouth was now hushed, and every eye turned towards him. At length, after eyeing him for some time from head to foot, the King exclaimed, “So, this is Zohrab ! Oh well done, my good fortune ! Zohrab is in my power ! This is he with a burnt father, who has so long laughed at our beards. By the head of the Shah, by the soul of Ali, let us give thanks to Allah ! Well done, my good fortune !”

All this while the youth kept a firm and

steady countenance, and although he now stood in face of the bitterest enemy of his father and his family, he exhibited such a manliness and bravery of appearance, that no one could see him without a feeling of respect.

“How came you here?” said the King to his prisoner in a taunting tone: “you less than man! What have you to do here?”

“What shall I say?” said Zohrab. “My evil star led me hither; of my own accord I came not.”

“If you do not fear the Shah, at least respect the corook. What had you to do with yonder women? Speak, before your tongue is cut out!”

“I have no news to give either of the corook, or of the Shah, or of the women. I was hunting — my hawk fled from me — I pursued him — I was benighted. The morning found me asleep under this rock — on awaking, I found two women standing before me, and shortly after I was surrounded by armed men. That is my history — what else can I say?”

By this time the rage of the tyrant, which

to this moment he had in a great measure suppressed, broke out upon witnessing the apparent coolness and indifference of his prisoner. "Dog's son! child of an unclean parent! ill-born, ill-begotten slave!" said he; "is it thus you speak to the Shah? You die not, but you shall live to misery! I will cut your accursed family into a thousand morsels! dogs shall defile their graves! — ay, the graves of your grandfathers and grandmothers, and all their ancestors! Take him, seize him!" roared he to his guards; "give him the shoe on the mouth if he speaks; tie him with the camel-tie, and lead him straight to the camp. Give him to the chief tent-pitcher, and let every tent-pitcher, one after the other, go and spit in his face; and then I will think of further acts of uncleanness to inflict upon him."

Upon this he rode off; and such was the violence of his rage, that he totally forgot the two unfortunate women, who were entranced with fears almost mortal at all they had heard, as they stood trembling behind the rock. They

not only had heard what was said by the King, but they also bore witness to the indignities that were offered by his officers and servants to the unfortunate young man, as they pinioned his arms previously to mounting him on horseback to conduct him to Firouzkoh. One said to him, "That a Mazanderani should be a dog, or a dog's father, is nothing new; but that he should turn rebel withal, is the strange part of it!"

"Yet, mashallah!" said another, "rebel as he is, still no doubt he and all his unclean generation call themselves princes and khans: let me do my worst on such princes' graves!"

"Give his elbows an extra twist with your shawl," said a young executioner's officer: "if he escapes, our heads, you know, will escape from off our shoulders."

All this time Zohrab said not a word, but allowed himself to be pinioned. The only effort he made was to turn himself towards the spot where the mistress of his heart had taken refuge; for his mind was more taken up with her situation than with his own miseries,

and he endeavoured by looks of sympathy to assure her how much he felt at this untoward issue of their first acquaintance. No other sign of recognition took place between them but furtive looks, nor was it till he was mounted and conducted away, that he could venture by an inclination of the body, to show her in any manner the respect and admiration with which she had inspired him.

As he was about departing, he released his hawk, and allowed it to take its flight, whilst he made a sign to his dog to leave him, which the faithful beast appearing to understand, obeyed, and was soon lost in the jungle, with his head in the direction of Asterabad.

CHAPTER IV.

A wise Vizir is the anchor of the state.

PERSIAN SAYING.

It will be necessary to pause a little in the progress of our narrative, in order to inform our reader of some necessary particulars. Zohrab was the son of Zaul Khan, who had long been a rival in power and ambition to the now more successful ruler of Persia. During the wars of Kerim Khan, and of his successors, they had been closely allied for their own safety; and as they were both Kajars, a tribe which held its principal seat in Mazanderan, they looked upon the alliance which existed between them more as a natural family tie than as a compact between one political body and another. Aga Mohamed,

from the superiority of his talents, and indeed owing to his descent from one who had as great a right to the throne of Persia as Kerim Khan or his descendants, had always been treated by Zaul as the chieftain of their tribe, and he acknowledged him as his lord paramount ; but in Persia every man who wears a sword, and who can collect about himself a band of followers, however small—the more needy the better—always keeps up a sort of hope that he may one day, like many an adventurer before him, fight his way to the throne ;—and so thought Zaul. He was a man famous for feats of strength and activity, for his unwearied perseverance and skill in whatsoever he undertook, and for a certain versatility of talent that had been of great use to him in his career through life. He was, moreover, brave, and consummate in all the arts of conciliation and negotiation ; so much so, that in spite of the superior power of the Shah, he managed to create a preponderating influence among the tribes of Turcomans that inhabited the country bordering upon Mazanderan.

During the existence of Kerim Khan and his descendants, there existed great friendship between Aga Mohamed and Zaul, and the latter had been very instrumental in discomfiting the many enemies which they possessed, and consequently placing his friend on the throne. For this he was invested with the government of Mazanderan, which, in fact, might be called a sort of hereditary property ; and he continued to reside, as he had always done, at Asterabad, where he and his kinsmen had taken root. During the first year of the King's reign he continued unmolested, strengthening himself by making friendship with the Turcomans, and was looked upon as one of the best supports of the monarchy. But the great success which crowned every enterprise of the new King, his increasing power, and the total subjugation in which he had now placed every part of Persia, turned the head of Aga Mohamed ; and where before he had behaved with liberality and honour, he now became oppressive and despotic. He forgot his obligations to Zaul, and behaved towards him as towards any other of his offi-

cers, vexing him with unjust exactions, and requiring heavier contributions than he was either able or willing to pay. This brought on much ill-feeling on both sides, until the Shah proposed to himself to dispossess Zaul, and to substitute a new governor. Zaul, feeling himself strong both in his own forces and in his Turcoman alliances, and still more secure by the natural strength of the country over which he governed, openly defied the power of the King, and resisted the approach of his governor.

It was on this occasion, for the first time, that the young Zohrab rendered himself conspicuous. The courage, hardihood, and wisdom which he displayed were so great, that they acquired for him the appellation of "the young Rostam," that celebrated Persian Hercules, whose miraculous feats were so much sung and historically recorded in that self-same country of Mazanderan. At the head of powerful bodies of his father's troops he led on the attack with the sagacity of an old general; and whenever prisoners fell in his way, they always

found that his humanity and generosity were equal to his bravery. Cherished by the Turcomans, their old grey-bearded chieftains looking upon him as their own son, he frequently undertook the longest and most painful expeditions, undergoing all their privations with a fortitude and a manliness which excited their surprise and admiration. At the period of our history he had passed his first youth: he was now about twenty-two years of age; his beard scarcely covered his chin, but to his fine person, which had developed itself into the firmest form, he added a mind which, had it been properly tutored, would have been unequalled in the most civilized age either ancient or modern. His name was well known throughout Persia, particularly on the border country in which this part of our narrative is laid; it was used as much by the nurse to quiet the cries of her child, as it was by the soldier as a watchword for vigilance and wariness. To gain possession of this youth was one of the favourite projects of the King; for, aware how devotedly fond of him were not only his parents and

family, but every person high or low throughout the country, he felt that, could he secure so excellent an hostage for the good behaviour of the rest of the tribe, he should at once obtain by policy all that force could not effect: our reader will therefore not be astonished at the joy expressed by the Shah at the unexpected circumstance which so effectually accomplished the object he had so frequently revolved in his mind. Indeed, so overwhelming had been the joy at his success, that it overpowered another strong feeling, that of jealousy for the honour and security of his harem, and which at any other moment would never have left his thoughts.

An event of this consequence put an end to the day's sport, and the King gave orders for an immediate return to the camp at Firouzkoh. It was, indeed, a melancholy ceremony to the captive, pinioned as he was, riding on a led horse, to be paraded in this public manner, open to the taunts and jeers of those who the day before would have turned pale at the mention of his name; but he bore all with forti-

tude, his courage and resolution rising with the desperate state of his fortunes. This event was known at the royal camp some time before the arrival of the captive; and when he came in view, every soul within it, and in its neighbourhood, had assembled to catch a glimpse of him. One might have supposed that the great Rustam, or even the *Div Sefid*,* or the white devil in person, had been secured, such was the curiosity raised. He alighted from his steed at the guard-tent, which is always placed at the entrance of the serperdeh, and was there kept in custody until it should be known what the King's wishes concerning him might be. During that interval, it was easy to ascertain what were in fact the intentions of the King towards him; for he was placed purposely in a conspicuous situation, and every worthless tongue was, as it were, invited to loose itself against the unfortunate captive. A bystander who could have noted down what struck his ear, would have heard observations to the following purpose. "A bankrupt Mazanderani

* A fabulous being celebrated in the *Shah nameh* of Ferdûsi.

indeed !—See of what an unclean generation it is !—I have defiled his father's grave !—An ass is too good for his mother !—Go home, child ! go tell your dog of a father that you have at length seen men and Persians.—What better than a dog ever came from Mazanderan ?”

Zohrab's nature might have been borne down by such unmanly insults, were he not upheld by one strong feeling, in addition to his own innate pride, namely, the passion which the beauty and fascination of the young Amima had raised in his breast. Her fame was spread abroad as much as his own. In his own country she was adored by reputation ; and she was looked upon as the only counteracting power to the King's cruelty and violence. Her charms were extolled as more extraordinary than those of the famous Shireen ; and many who knew the perfections of Zohrab, were not wanting to flatter him with the assurance that he alone, throughout the land of Irâk, was worthy to possess such a treasure. Will it be thought strange, then, that in such a climate, and in a Mahomedan country, where love at first sight

is of no unfrequent occurrence, Zohrab should have been so entirely subdued by this short though casual interview with our heroine? That he was so, is most certain; for the total absorption of his mind in reflecting upon her image, in calling back every circumstance of the interview, in repeating every word that was spoken, in the interpretation of every look—all told him that this event had cast the lot of his future existence; and, let the base herd about him rail all they might, still the possibility of his having created some interest in her breast cheered him, and gave a solace to his thoughts, without which he might have given himself up to despair.

The King's first act upon reaching his camp, was to despatch an express messenger to Tehran requiring the immediate presence of his minister, Hajji Ibrahim. In every question of state policy, he made it a point to ally this wise man to his councils; and as upon the proper administration of the person of his prisoner mainly depended the future subjection of Mazanderan to his power, and the friendship of

the Turcomans, he felt that, if ever there was a necessity for the advice of a steady counsellor, this was the moment. In the meanwhile, he could with difficulty restrain himself from using violence towards Zohrab, whose fortitude under affliction, and whose steady indifference to the indignities cast upon him, excited his unavailing rage. “What!” would he exclaim, “is this burnt father’s whelp to beard me in my very camp—to defy my corook—to invade my territory, and to laugh at my beard, without receiving the punishment due to his crime?” He ordered the Humpback to keep a spy upon every word and action of the unfortunate youth, whilst at the same time he made Sadek, (also his confidential servant,) give him occasionally a counterbalancing account.

In the course of the second day, Hajji Ibrahim was ready to stand before the King. He had arrived with all the haste of a courier, which he knew was one of the best modes of securing the good will of his irritable master, and without waiting to take off his boots, or

shake off the dust of the road, he was introduced into the King's tent.

“ You are welcome, O Hajji !” exclaimed the King: “ Come, come, in God's name! approach, for my soul is dried up, so much does this ill-born Mazanderani excite my bile—what shall we do with him ?”

“ May I be your sacrifice !” said the Vizir, “ let not the Shah spoil his unexpected good fortune by precipitation. If a dog be a dog, it is of no use repining that he is not an angel. With a little forbearance, the asylum of the universe will become master of Mazanderan and the Turcomans to boot—a contrary line of conduct will lose him the prize for ever.”

“ Well you say, Hajji. Without you, the Shah would ere this have cut off the young caitiff's head, and thrown it over the walls of Asterabad, as a *peishkesh* (or present) to his unsainted father. Speak on—what is to be done ?”

“ Who am I, that should venture to speak my mind before the King of kings !” said the Vizir: “ I am less than dust ! Still the com-

mands of the King are absolute. Your slave's opinion is this—that, instead of treating the Mazanderani with violence, he ought to be treated with kindness; that he should be detained as a hostage, but that his detention should be made as agreeable to him as possible. Let your Majesty give him some one to wife; let future advancement at court be promised to him; and he will probably be reconciled into a faithful servant, instead of being the means of keeping alive a warlike spirit among a portion of your Majesty's subjects, who for the interests of Irân should be conciliated. Your slave has spoken what he had to say; for the rest, it remains in the royal breast to judge whether he has spoken wisdom or the contrary?"

Upon hearing these words, the Shah held his peace for some time, and appeared wrapped in thought, until at length he slowly drawled out,

"*Eyb ne dared*: there is no harm—*Bad nemi goui*: you do not speak amiss—In truth, you said well—*Barikallah*—oh, well done! You

have given good advice, Hajji, by the head of the King! By the head of the King!" he repeated again, "you have spoken well. True is the well-known saying, that a good Vizir is the anchor of the state; and such you are, Hajji. Go, now; go and take your rest, and again we will speak upon this subject. It is well I had not taken away the fellow's soul."

The Vizir was then dismissed; but still the Shah could not refrain from molesting his prisoner. Like the bloodhound, which, though muzzled, still snarls and snaps at what he thinks ought to be his prey, so the cruel propensities of the despot were longing to indulge themselves, notwithstanding the shackles of prudence which his minister had thrown over him. "What says he now?" he exclaimed to the Humpback, as he quietly entered the tent, and stood at the foot of the carpet.

"May I be your sacrifice!" he answered: "the captive says nothing; but it is evident that he is highly satisfied with himself. He looks down upon men like dirt. He keeps his nose up, and heeds none of the abuse, praise

be to God ! which the *bachaha*, the children, give him."

"Have you found out what brought him into this neighbourhood ; or is the story which he relates the truth ?" said the Shah.

"By the salt of the King ! by the soul of his father !" answered the spy, "it is impossible to discover ; so closely does he keep to the saying, that to speak little is as precious as silver, but not to speak at all is more precious than gold."

"And so you acknowledge yourself an ass ?" exclaimed the King. "You ill-begotten varlet ! is the King to bear with your presence, and not to be rewarded for it ? Is an old beard like yours to be out-manceuvred by a smooth chin ? Go, animal ! go, and do your office better. If you do not pick the Mazanderani's brain, the King will destroy yours."

The Humpback, although he was accustomed to such language from the lips of his master, yet never heard imputations thrown out against his ingenuity without feeling a rush of wrath in his breast ; and he felt it the

stronger in this instance, because Zohrab had, in fact, foiled all his endeavours to extract from him any information, either personal or political. On the other hand, Sadek, his rival, had succeeded in acquiring more of the captive's confidence in a short conference, than the other had, by all his arts of cunning and ingenuity, during long visits, and this because Zohrab had discovered that the valet was brother to the attendant of the mistress of his heart. Who that has ever been in love has not felt that instantaneous interest created by any thing, animate or inanimate, which is connected, however remotely, with the object of his affections? It will not, then, be thought extraordinary that, the moment Zohrab found that Sadek was brother to the confidant of the lady Amima, he endeavoured to create an interest for himself in that man's mind. And he succeeded; for Sadek, although a man of stern aspect, had a kind heart, which was ever ready to espouse the cause of the unfortunate; and so interested had he become in the fate and destiny of Zohrab, that he made a vow to for-

ward his views and happiness to the utmost that prudence might warrant. When, therefore, he next attended the King, he did not fail to place the conduct of the captive in the most favourable light possible, asserting that the account which he had given of himself was the truth, and nothing but the truth; that he had shown the greatest moderation and forbearance, in not resenting the indignities which were offered to him since his residence in the camp, and seemed to resign himself to his fate with all the fortitude becoming a true believer.

Such a report as this, coming at the back of the advice which had been given by the Prime Vizir, did not fail to produce some influence upon the mind of the Shah, and he gradually relaxed the feelings of irritation which he had at first cherished towards his prisoner. Although cruelty and misanthropy formed the foundation of his character, still he possessed sufficient control over himself to ascertain the best policy to pursue, and sufficient forbearance to suppress his passions whenever they interfered with his interests.

On the following morning the King called his minister before him : he so fully understood his worth, that he was scarcely ever known to shrink from allowing his coolness and judgment to allay the impetuosity of his own passions. In getting up that day, and during the usual operations of his toilet, he had again received favourable impressions of Zohrab from Sadek ; and when Hajji Ibrahim came into his presence, he was in a sufficiently good frame of mind to act with the moderation towards his prisoner which his Vizir had recommended.

“ Well,” said the Shah, “ have you made any thought for the good of our service ? We are well pleased with your advice, and require more.”

“ In addition to what your slave ventured to place at the feet of your Majesty,” answered the Hajji, “ he has thought, that if the prisoner were confided to the care of the Shah’s chief executioner, Zerb Ali Khan, who would be responsible for his safe custody, to be for the first year confined to the walls of his house, until he was duly settled by marriage, and in-

stalled in office at the Shah's gate, the Shah's government would thereby be benefited. A hostage of his consequence requires more watchfulness and precaution than a common hostage."

"So be it, so be it," said the Shah: "you have not spoken ill: we are satisfied." At the same time he ordered Sadek, who was in attendance, immediately to send for the chief executioner.

This office, one of considerable consequence in the Persian court, was always held by a man of great rank, and never far removed from the person of the King. He soon made his appearance, and having taken off his shoes at some distance, made one of his lowest prostrations before his royal master. In person he was tall, strong, and square-shouldered, of a fierce aspect, his eyes shaded by a heavy and hairy brow, his beard full and crisp, and bearing in his aspect the air of dissolute manners, accompanied by uncompromising severity.

"Zerb Ali," said the Shah, "you are to take

into your special charge, Zohrab, our prisoner, which the *taleh* (or good luck) of the King so recently placed in our hands, and keep him in safe custody as a royal hostage, to be delivered to us whenever he may be required ; and upon your head be it, if you fail in this your duty !”

“ *Be cheshm !* upon my eyes be it !” said the man of violence, with an impassive countenance.

“ You are to treat him with care and attention, for he is of our tribe and our relative ! Let him want for nothing save liberty, and report to us his conduct during his confinement.”

“ *Be cheshm !*” said Zerb Ali Khan.

“ He must communicate with no one, save such persons as we may from time to time permit,” said the King, after having paused some little time in thought.

“ *Be cheshm !*” said the Khan.

“ Is there any thing else ?” said the Shah to his Vizir : “ have we any other order to give ?”

“ May I be your sacrifice !” answered the minister : “ the Shah might issue his commands for his future settlement in life, as one of the King’s servants.”

“ True, true,” exclaimed the Shah : “ It has just come to our recollection, Zerb Ali, that you have a daughter—a daughter, beautiful, large-eyed, a person of great dignity, and the mistress of a good understanding. Let her be given in marriage to Zohrab Khan. It is so fitting for the prosperity of Irân. That this be secret, on your head be it !”

“ *Be cheshm !*” said the chief executioner, with the same unaltered tone and countenance.

The King then said to him, “ You are dismissed :” and once more making his prostration, this emblem of the King’s executive power took his departure.

The rigid and unrelaxing muscles of the King’s face broke out into something that might be called a smile, as the executioner left his presence. “ That is a good servant ! *Wallah billah !*” said he ; “ he would as soon order his daughter to marry, as he would order a head to be cut off. Whatever else I may be deficient in,” continued he in a musing tone, “ I am rich in good servants. Mashallah ! Praise be to God ! Mohamed Shah needs not fear

his enemies, with such helps as his good fortune has given him !” Then turning to Hajji Ibrahim, who still stood before him, he said, “ Shall we see the youth—shall we order him into our presence ?”

“ Whatever the King may order, so let it be,” answered the Vizir. “ Perhaps your Majesty had better first decide upon the steps necessary to be taken with respect to his father Zaul Khan, the Turcomans, and the state of the province of Mazanderan.”

“ Mashallah, Mashallah !” exclaimed the King, “ you are in truth a Vizir. Yes, the capture of Zohrab must immediately be known in Mazanderan, that the dogs of rebels may from this moment feel that their heads are left without a cap to cover them. We must forthwith despatch a messenger, and he must possess some token from Zohrab himself, to prove the truth of our message.”

“ Yes, yes,” said the Vizir, returning at the same time the high compliments which had been paid to him for wisdom and foresight : “ Whose dog am I, that should be called wise,

when there is none in wisdom equal to our asylum of the universe?"

The King then ordered his attendants to bring Zohrab the Mazanderani before him. He would have wished to make a public exhibition of his prisoner, and have received him in his pavilion of state; but the Vizir reminding his master that every thing ought now to be done to conciliate, he allowed policy to get the better of his inclination, and agreed to receive him where they were, in the *khelwet*, or tent of retirement.

Sadek, on whom the office of introducing persons into the *khelwet* devolved, had taken special care that none but himself should produce the hostage before his master. He wished to forewarn him of the decisions which had been made concerning him, in order to soften, if possible, the inflexibility of temper which he discovered to be one of the leading features of Zohrab's character, and thus lead him to receive more favourably than he was otherwise likely to do, the language that would be addressed to him by the Shah. He found him seated in the

corner of his place of confinement, having just risen from his morning prayer, with a mind so refreshed by this exercise that he was ready to meet with fortitude, and even with alacrity, whatever might be his fate. At the sight of Sadek he sprang on his feet and welcomed him with every greeting of friendship; for he alone had shown any feeling for his situation, and he knew him also to be the only link between himself and the object of his passion. He eagerly enquired what was to be his fate, meaning by that how long he still might be permitted to live: so fully had he come to the conclusion, that death alone could finish the catastrophe of his captivity. His feelings on hearing Sadek's answer may better be imagined than described; he almost entirely overlooked the horrors of a protracted confinement, the absence from his family, the wreck of his ambitious views in life, in the one hope of living for her who he felt was for ever linked with his own destiny.

Sadek informed him of every thing that had been decided, excepting that which related to the proposed marriage with the chief exe-

cutioner's daughter; for he thought it right not to touch upon a point which the Shah had expressly intended should be kept secret. The youth listened to every word with breathless attention. Had he never seen Amima, he would have looked upon the state of a hostage as the greatest misfortune that could have befallen him, and would have spurned at every compromise which might have been proposed to him between it and death; but now he appeared in no way dismayed at the prospects it held out. All he saw before him was the pleasure of living in the same atmosphere, within the same walls, perhaps in sight of the very spot which contained her who was more to him than either life or liberty. At any other time, he would have met the Shah as an equal, or have advanced towards him as a martyr does to the stake: but now his nature was changed, he promised Sadek that he would demean himself with becoming docility, and endeavour to say nothing which might excite the wrath of the present director of his fate, whatever might be the provocation.

CHAPTER V.

A soft answer turneth away wrath, but grievous words stir up anger.

PROVERBS OF SOLOMON.

UPON appearing before the King, Zohrab made no difficulty in going through all the prescribed etiquette, leaving his slippers at the proper place and making the usual prostrations. Sadek would have kept him at the utmost possible distance, in order thereby to show his humility; but, the Shah ordering him to advance to an easy speaking distance, he obeyed, and stood, nothing daunted, with head erect and a firm countenance, exhibiting in his person a specimen of manly beauty which strongly contrasted with the degraded form before whom he stood.

The Shah, having eyed him for some time,

said to his Prime Minister, in conformity to the policy which he had determined to adopt, although in so doing the words seemed to stick at the bottom of his throat, “Mashallah, Zohrab is a fine youth !”

“*Belli, belli*, yes, yes,” echoed Hajji Ibrahim, with the drawl of indifference which Persians are wont to throw over their words ; afraid lest the Shah might perceive how much in truth he was impressed with the strong contrast formed by the two individuals before him.

A pause ensued, during which the King still continued to eye his prisoner as if he could not sufficiently enjoy the pleasure of possessing him, until at length, no longer able to suppress the malice of his nature, he said, in a tone of intimacy, half raillery and half earnest ;

“Zohrab, allow that your father is viler than the vilest dog ; that the abomination which he devours is daily, hourly, and constantly ; and that it is owing to his intrigues that the Turcomans have also partaken thereof, whilst you, who are innocent—you are to bear the punishment. Is it not so, Hajji Ibrahim ?”

The Vizir answered, " I am your sacrifice !"

Zohrab, on hearing these words, changed colour, contracted his brow, and bit his lips, but having caught the eye of Sadek, whose looks seemed to enjoin discretion, he remained silent.

" Unsainted curs that they are, they think." continued the King, " that their ill-begotten alliance is of importance to the state of Irân ; that, because I have allowed them to rally round my kettles in my wars, to be honoured with the dust of my horses, I cannot now do without them ; that, because they are intrenched in impenetrable jungles, and surrounded by mountains of difficult access, they are secure in their enmity to me, and can laugh at our beards with impunity. But we are not animals to that extent :—I am that King who has burnt the fathers of the Muscovites in their very hearths ;—I am he who has made the dogs of Franks lick the dust of my slippers, and who has made Persia so secure from one end to the other, that the richest merchant of Ispahan, with bags of tomans on his head, might meet the neediest Baktiari on the high road, and walk by him unskinned and unrob-

bed. Whose dogs are ye then, ye boors of Mazanderan ! who dare to set up the standard of rebellion ? Wallah billah ! by Allah ! by the beard of the holy Prophet ! by the sword of Ali ! I swear that, were it not for this man," pointing to his Vizir, " you, Zohrab, with all your tribe, your old defiled father at the head, should grace the doorways of Tehran, cut into quarters and halves of quarters, before another moon had gone over your heads ; and your skins be spread upon the thresholds of the doors of every dog of a Jew and Christian, in order that ye might be defiled and reviled, spurned at and degraded, by those who are worse than the fathers of dogs ! Do you hear," cried out the frantic King, particularly addressing his helpless captive, at the utmost stretch of his unmanly voice ; " do you hear ? Open your eyes, O you less than man ! and make your thanks to Allah, that you have met with sufficient forbearance from the Shah to keep your head upon your shoulders, at a time when it ought to have been thrown under our horses' feet."

During this speech, the revulsion which had

taken place in Zohrab's breast had entirely destroyed the equanimity which he had resolved to adopt, and made him lose sight, not only of his own safety, and of the peculiar danger of his situation, but of the tender passion which had taken possession of him. When his father was branded with the epithets which had so frequently struck his ear, he could scarcely restrain himself from rushing on the ungenerous utterer. His young blood boiled with indignation at the ignominy of this treatment. Although in his cooler moments he had thought himself sufficiently armed against the language which he had been warned was certainly to be addressed to him, yet, by the utmost stretch of his imagination, he never could have persuaded himself that it would amount to the insolence and coarseness which had just struck his ear. At the last words which came from the King, Zohrab drew himself up into an attitude of dignity and resolution, and with a face beaming with determination and contempt of consequences, he said with a firm voice, "I am in thy hands, it is true, an unprotected

man, and thou hast the power to do with me what thou pleasest; but hearken to my words! Whatever thou hast said concerning me I forgive thee: thou mayest tear me to pieces, thou mayest make me food for dogs, or thou mayest give me up to thy slaves to be tormented, and I will not complain; but when thou abusest my father, who is thy equal, and to whom thou partly owest thy elevation, who compared to thee is as the finest gold to the vilest copper, then I will speak: then I will tell thee, base dog! that I throw back thy odious words to thy face, and that I spit upon thy odious presence. And now do thy worst!”

The springing of a mine, the burst of a volcano, the first ebullition of popular tumult, are poor images with which to compare the explosion of frenzy which took place in the tyrant's breast upon hearing this speech. Every epithet that condensed rage could excite broke from his lips, in a tone of voice which resembled the ravings of hysterical madness. He half rose from his seat, grasping his dagger, as if he himself would give the finishing to

his wrath by plunging it into the breast of his victim; and would probably have completed the object of his first impulse, had not Sadek with great presence of mind thrown himself upon Zohrab, as if he would have done what his master was upon the point of doing. This movement in some measure checked the King's wrath, and he reseated himself; but the moment he could resume his voice, he called out to the attendant ferashes, "Children of burnt fathers, where are you? Will you see your King insulted and not avenge him? Kill, kill that unsainted dog, and throw his vile carcase to the crows!" Upon which Sadek rushed from the presence, as if to collect his band of ferashes; but one more zealous than the rest, having stepped forward with a naked dagger in his hand, would have immediately executed the fatal command, had not the Grand Vizir with the utmost precipitation thrown himself upon his knees before the King, and exclaimed, "I am your sacrifice! For the honour of your throne, shed no blood!—for the love of the blessed Prophet, as you

would save your soul, let the wretch live ! The interests of your throne are too precious to be thrown away for so pitiful a thing as this young fool's life."

The devotedness of this action, the sight of one so respected in so humiliating a posture, and the forcible words which he uttered, produced an immediate effect upon the Shah. A sign from his uplifted hand to the ferashes immediately stopped the death-blow which they were about to inflict upon the unfortunate Zohrab. Still feeling the raging of his anger within himself, and not permitting himself to look at his prisoner, with an averted face he roared out "*Bero!*" (begone) as if by that he had rid himself of an intolerable burthen ; and when he was sure that the object of his wrath had been taken from his presence, he then turned to his still prostrate minister, and said, " Arise, Hajji : as for thyself, I am contented with thee ; but that dog of a Mazanderani, by Allah ! by Allah ! happen what will, him I will never forgive ! I will sweep him and his odious tribe from the face of the earth. After

all, why should I—I, who am a Shah upon my own musnud, bear this excess of abomination?"

Upon this Hajji Ibrahim rose, and endeavoured, by every argument in his power, to show how totally unworthy of a great King it was, in the first place, to shed the blood of an unprotected prisoner, and in the next, to lose a prize of such value as Zohrab, with all its political advantages, merely to gratify a feeling of revenge. It will be easily imagined, that in the temper in which the Shah then was, the Vizir did not fail to enforce what he had to say in language the most palatable to a despot's ear. He succeeded in his object, but he did not go far in allaying the storm of anger and mortification which the words of the youth had raised, and which would not fail to sink deeper and deeper in the tyrant's mind as he dwelt upon them. In order to divert the current of his thoughts from their present channel, the Vizir allowed applicants on business, or other pursuits, to be admitted to the King's presence. Among others, appeared the Shikar

Bashi, or the chief huntsman, with whom our readers have already become acquainted. He was a heavy-headed man, with a copious appendage of black beard and moustaches, large eyes and shaggy brows, mounted upon Herculean shoulders. Coarse and rough in manner, he little knew the forms of a court; and although the King in the field allowed much latitude in the quantum of homage which was due to him, yet in general he was very punctilious when seated on his musnud, being aware that, among a people greatly alive to outward show, half the terror attached to his high situation would vanish, were he ever to allow of one step which had the appearance of intimacy.

In order to comprehend the nature of the chief huntsman's present intrusion at court, the reader must be informed that it was frequently the custom among the Kings of Persia, after a great and successful hunting party, in which game of all descriptions, such as antelopes, deer, wild goats, boars, and wild asses were slain, to erect a pillar, upon which the heads of such

animals were fixed, either in niches, or on exterior hooks. There is a specimen of one such pillar now to be seen at Guladûn near Ispahan, the record of a hunt of the famous Shah Ismael, which, notwithstanding the lapse of centuries, still exhibits numerous skulls and horns of wild animals. Aga Mohamed Shah on this occasion had determined to leave a similar record. His hunting excursion, to the moment of Zohrab's seizure, had been extraordinarily successful; and when this unlooked-for piece of good fortune had befallen him, on the impulse of the moment he determined to erect a pillar of skulls, a *kelleh minar*, as it is called, in order that he might place the head of his prisoner, or, as one of his courtiers had called it, his finest head of game, on the summit, thus to commemorate the great success of this eventful day. The order was given to the Shikar Bashi on the field, and, not having been countermanded, was so quickly executed, that the monument had been erected, and all its niches duly filled with the heads, before any fresh order on the subject could be given. An

iron spike was seen to issue from the summit, as if waiting for its last victim.

As soon as the chief huntsman appeared before the Shah, he made an awkward prostration of the body, and, without taking off his boots, which in fact is etiquette for men of his profession, began his speech before the King had even deigned to look upon him.

This want of respect put the match, as it were, to the inflammable workings of the King's mind, and set fire to a train of angry epithets, which burst forth in the following manner :

“ Who art thou, dog? whose cur art thou? Why dost thou stand before me with that head of thine, which ought long ago to have been food for a bomb? Must the Shah continue to partake of disrespect, as if he were a Jew or a Frank? Am I no one in my own dominions? Bearded by a Mazanderani boy!—now butted at by a cow who would call itself a man! Speak, *merdiki*,* speak! wherefore standest thou there?”

The rough forester, little expecting such a

* *Merdiki*! a little man.

reception, stood like one impaled, with his tongue cleaving to the roof of his mouth, and at first could scarcely utter beyond his "*Arzi mi kunum*," until after various attempts, fear having almost paralyzed his senses, he exclaimed, "The pillar is ready to kiss your feet; it is ready; the skulls have all been placed; there is only one skull wanting at the top—only one skull, by the head of the King! only one skull."

Whether acting under the influence of an eunuch's waywardness, or whether the King was struck by the coincidence of the chief huntsman's exposition, "one skull, by the head of the King!" is not to be explained, but certain it is, that he yielded at once to the temptation of spilling blood which was circulating in the fullest vigour throughout his frame, and exclaimed, "One head thou wantest?" "Yes," said the huntsman, "yes, one head, may it so please your Majesty." "What head can be better than thine?" roared the tyrant, in savage merriment. "Here, off with his head. *Ahi, Nasakchi*, executioner," he exclaimed to a man

of bloody deeds, who was always in attendance, “here, go complete the minar.” There was a hesitation amongst the attendant officers in the execution of this atrocious deed. The man called upon to act went doggedly to work, and innocence spoke so powerfully in favour of the poor wretch, that every one present seemed to expect that so barbarous an order would be countermanded; but no! the animal was rife for blood, and blood it was determined to have. His horrid face broke into a demoniacal expression of fury when he saw that there was hesitation in obeying his commands. The ragged skin which fell in furrows down his cheeks began to bloat, the eyes seemed to roll in blood, and the whole frame, from which in general all circulation seemed to fly, wore a purple hue; he would have darted from off his seat, and not only himself have executed the fatal sentence upon his victim, but would have extended his revengeful fury to those who had refused to be the ministers of it, had not the Nasakchi Bashi in person (worthy servant of such a master) who had just reached the

scene of action, with a light and cunning step crept behind the victim, and with one blow of his deadly black Khorassan blade, severed the unfortunate man's head from his body. The heavy corpse fell with a crash on one side, whilst the head bounded towards the despot, the eyes glaring horribly, the tongue protruded to a frightful length, and streams of gore flowing and spouting in all directions. The Vizir, who was upon the point of again endeavouring to allay the passions of his dangerous master, had been too late to stop the executioner's hand; but well was it for him that he did delay, for nothing but the appalling scene that now presented itself could have counteracted the violence of the King. The moment he saw blood, he seemed at once to be soothed into quiet. In the most wicked of our natures there is often a revulsion from evil to good. Conscience will raise her voice, although she may at first be refused a hearing. The lion gorged with his spoil, at once is tamed. This was the case with the Shah. He contemplated his work with a thoughtful look, his features resumed their wont-

ed dull and leaden expression, and then, as if his wayward nature was not satisfied with tormenting him, he turned with asperity to the Nasakchi Bashi, and accused him in no measured terms with having officiously interposed in what was no business of his. "Dog and villain!" he exclaimed, "why did you slay my chief huntsman? what demon impelled your officious hand to this deed? Well is it for you that there is such a feeling as compassion, and that the Shah can spare as well as spill! Go, go! clear up your work, and finish it by wiping your ownself from our presence."

Although similar scenes, equally characteristic of the cruelty and caprice of their instigator, were not uncommon, still to the horror of this scene succeeded a dread and appalling silence throughout the camp. Every man present began to feel insecure of his own immediate existence: whatever might be his innocence, however unconnected he might be with the deceased, still he was apprehensive that a look might betray him to death, or that an attitude might be interpreted into arrogance when

it was intended for one of humility. Even the prime minister felt in his person the chilling neighbourhood of a murderer, and he would willingly have taken his leave, but that he feared some sinister meaning would be affixed to such a step.

At length the King broke silence, and in a tone half sarcastic and half angry thus addressed the Vizir: "Well, so you have saved your hostage at the expense of your King's wrath, and of one of his most faithful servants! Now let us see what next thy wisdom will perform. We have our Zohrab here, it is true; he is bound hand and foot: so many maunds* of flesh and so many miscals of blood. What then? will such a possession secure to us the quiet possession of Mazanderan, and the obedience of the Turcomans? Will that unsainted lion, his father, agree to give up his independence, his actual sovereignty over one of our finest provinces, for this cub of his whom we have caught? Speak, O Hajji; much wisdom is required of thee for having stayed our

* Maunds and miscals—Persian weights.

hand in doing a deed due to justice and ourselves, instead of one which deprives us of services that are difficult to be replaced. Innocent blood, man, is not spilt with impunity !”

The blood of the Hajji mounted into his face, and he would have rebutted with indignation an accusation which implied that he was accessory to the murder of the huntsman, had not his habitual prudence come to his aid, and tempered his feelings by supplying the language of wisdom to his lips. “ May it please the asylum of the universe !” said he, “ who am I, that can venture to give advice ? I am less than the dust under thy footsteps : but let the Shah only send a messenger to the Khan of Asterabad, and tell him that his son is a royal prisoner—that death will be his fate if he does not acknowledge immediate subjection to the Shah’s will ; and upon thy slave’s head be it, if something beneficial to the weal of Persia comes not forth from such a proceeding.”

“ And upon thy head be it, and upon the head of the hostage !” said the King with emphasis. “ If within one week I receive not the

fullest proofs of submission from the rebel Zaul, by the head of the Shah ! by the head of the Shah !* Zohrab dies. Go, see you to this ; from your hands I expect a speedy delivery from our state of indecision." And then, turning to Sadek, he said, " And into your hands, Sadek Aga, I place the prisoner, until we reach the city. Upon thy head be it, should he escape !"

Upon this he arose, and in thoughtful mood retired to his khelwet, whilst those who had been in some measure spell-bound by his presence, felt relieved of an impending scourge as they saw him depart. The remains of the murdered man had been taken away by the nasakchees, and were immediately buried without the camp, the naked pike at the summit of the Pillar of Skulls remaining a memorial of the atrocity of the horrid scene which has been here recorded. Although sudden deaths of this description were common events, yet surprise struck everybody at this particular one, be-

* It is a common custom now, as of old, for Eastern monarchs to swear by their own head.

cause the individual sacrificed had been a favourite servant, and one whose services it would be difficult to replace; but the rage of the despot knew no bounds; whatever came in the way of his passion at the time it was in action, was sure to feel its dire effects.

Zohrab, in the mean while, had returned to his former confinement with a mind in the highest degree of excitement, having just escaped the jaws of death, and being still so indifferent about life that he felt no joy at its possession, but would have been happy for some good reason to get rid of it. He felt himself abandoned by all; the sentiment which had cheered his heart before the late scene took place, was blighted. "Who," said he to himself, "will ever think of one doomed to misery, lasting, hopeless misery?" He reflected, that upon his account his family were about to be plunged into disastrous wars, which could only terminate in ruin and desolation. He a thousand times wished himself dead; he deplored the interposition of the Vizir; he wished that the kindness of Sadek had not been exerted in his

favour ; and he would have himself plunged his own dagger into his breast, had not the principles which he had imbibed in his youth, strengthened by the doctrines which he had read both in books and the Koran, come to his assistance, and driven the dastardly expedient from his mind.

“ If misfortunes are decreed to me from on high,” said he, “ let me endeavour to meet them with the fortitude that becomes a man and a true believer. Let me imitate those of our martyrs who have bled for causes much more aggravated than mine.” He was revolving these and such like thoughts in his mind, when the door of his tent was suddenly lifted up, and he saw before him the Grand Vizir in person, who came attended by none but Sadek. The prepossessing countenance of this minister, and his tone of conciliation, acted upon the excited feelings of the prisoner with all the effect of a charm ; and the friendly looks of a face like Sadek’s, which scarcely ever disrobed itself of its sternness, contributed in great measure to subdue his violence. A visit of this descrip-

tion too, at a moment when he expected to see at least a gang of executioners, produced an instant re-action in his mind ; and from the extreme of despondency hope again dawned, and he could turn once more to the thoughts of home, and also to those softer emotions in which he had allowed himself to indulge.

The Vizir having seated himself, and requested Zohrab to do the same, whilst Sadek stood at the further extremity of the tent, said, “ Hear ! I am come as much your friend, and your father’s friend, as I am a faithful servant to my own King. I am going to ask of you that only to which every person who has the smallest sense would immediately consent.”

“ You have saved my life, worthless as it is,” said Zohrab, “ therefore I am bound to you by every tie of gratitude. Whatever you desire, provided it be consistent with duty, I am bound to obey ; but recollect, O my Aga, that it is you I obey. From you I may expect justice. But let me say, that if the abuse which I heard bestowed upon my father by the mouth of the Shah, be again repeated to me even through

your's — here is Zohrab your prisoner, he agrees to nothing, save acquiescence in instant death."

"My son," answered the Minister, "there is much to be said in extenuation of the King's wrath; but of that no more. You will hear no more abuse. All we wish is peace; and though you may now look upon your captivity as a misfortune, yet believe me, if you will subscribe to what I ask of you, the day is not far distant when you will praise the destiny which threw you into the Shah's hands; and affirm with the sage, that 'The sprinkling of ashes and tearing of garments may happen in the morning, but the song of the minstrel and the clapping of hands may close the evening.'"

"God grant it may be so!" said the prisoner: "We are men of peace; we like quiet, and only wish to sit in our corner — but we also abhor injustice. I am ready to open my ears."

"Then hear," said the Hajji. "It is now several years since your father has kept possession of Mazanderan, and has refused to acknowledge the Shah as sovereign of Irân.

Zohrab Khan, this cannot be. The whole of Persia is now in his hands—he is everywhere recognised—he has triumphed over every enemy—he is a Gazi*—he is feared by the Turks, respected by the Muscovites. Is it to be supposed that one so powerful, with armies so disciplined and numerous as his, will not be able at length, notwithstanding the nature of your fastnesses and the alliance of the Turcomans, to overcome this ill-judged resistance, and visit your rebellion with the most disastrous acts of vengeance? But laying aside his power, here is Fate, a more powerful auxiliary than steel and cannon, which decides itself in his favour. You, you, Zohrab! which, be it known to you, is a name of much more consequence than whole legions of Turcomans, or a whole nation of Mazanderanis, have fallen into his hands. Think you, in wisdom, that he can forego taking advantage of such an event, and of adopting a mediator so powerful? Yes, and by my advice the Shah acts—you are from this day a

* *Gazi*, or conqueror—a title which is given to a King who successfully commands his own armies.

hostage. But at the same time, we place the length of your captivity in your own hands. Write to your father, forthwith to proceed in person to the foot of the Shah's throne—to claim the protection of his skirt—to acknowledge that he and his have never ceased to transgress—to own themselves his vassals; and from that moment you are free—you enjoy the Shah's pardon—you become the choicest of his servants—and peace, happiness, and security will take place of apprehension, danger, and impending disaster. I, who am Hajji Ibrahim, I am security for the truth of what I say."

Zohrab, upon hearing these words, remained for some time absorbed in thought; but at length he said, "I am fully grateful for all that you are pleased to say on my account; but in spite of the importance into which you wish to exalt me, believe me, O Hajji! I am held as nothing but a beardless boy in the councils of my father, and that, even were I to accede to your wishes, and insist with him upon the adoption of them, my words

would be without effect, and, like the shaft shot from the slack bow into the earthen mound, would be looked upon as the essays of a youth, and not as the wisdom of full-grown age. No, it is not for me to presume to offer advice. All I can do is, to assure my father of the fact that I am the Shah's prisoner; but at the same time I shall insist upon his acting entirely without reference to me, as if no such being as the ill-fated Zohrab existed. More I cannot do. Forgive the plainness of my speech, but more I cannot do."

"You are young, you are young," said the Vizir in a playful manner to the youth, at the same time laying his hand on his shoulder; "when you shall have, Inshallah! acquired a beard of this growth," touching the end of his own, "and the grey hairs which years throw into it, you will find that prudence is better than ill-judged valour, and that a few words of wisdom well directed, are of more value than the most glorious feats of arms in a wrong cause. However, you know best. I am your

friend, I wish you well ; but let me again persuade you to do all you can to bring your father and his dependents to terms of submission to the Shah. We send off a messenger this very hour for Asterabad, and he shall take your letter. Write with despatch ; and may the Prophet inspire you to write that which may bring peace and divert bloodshed !”

Upon this he arose and left the tent, whilst Zohrab made proper professions of thanks for the interest which he expressed in his fate.

Sadek, all this time, although he had not spoken, had not remained an unconcerned spectator, but seemed, by his occasional turns of expression and manner, to enforce the words of the Prime Vizir. He remained behind to give the prisoner the materials for writing his letter ; and during that short interval, endeavoured to impress upon him the necessity of some immediate friendly communication being made by his father to the Shah ; for, were it delayed, there was no doubt that, wound up as the wrath of the despot had been, death, inevitable death, would be his fate ; and a war of exter-

mination would be waged against Mazanderan, the ultimate object of which would be the destruction of Asterabad, of Zaul, and of the Turcoman tribes in alliance with him. "If you are a good man and a good son," exclaimed Sadek, as he was leaving the tent, "you will do all in your power to avert the mischiefs which we have announced to you as impending."

Zohrab lost no time in writing his letter, which contained precisely what he had informed the Grand Vizir it was his intention to write. With all that high feeling of filial respect which is so common in Persia, and which in his breast was almost paramount to every other worldly consideration, he felt that some blame might attach to himself for having allowed his ardour for the chase to carry him so far beyond the bounds of prudence and the frontiers of his own country, thus bringing on his family misfortunes, which perhaps would otherwise have been averted; and that motive, added to others, prevented his giving any advice which might appear to aim at his own

preservation. This done, he rolled up his letter, and unsealed delivered it to Sadek, who very soon after had returned to seek it.

In the mean while the Grand Vizir had addressed an imperial firman, on the part of the Shah, to Zaul Khan, the governor, *Zabits*,* and *Ketkhodas* of Mazanderan, as well as to the chiefs of the Turcomans residing in that province, ordering them, on pain of being treated as rebels, to appear in person before him within a given time: and at the same time stating that, should they disobey, the prisoner Zohrab, now held as a hostage in his hands for their good behaviour, would infallibly be put to death. This was accompanied by a letter from the Grand Vizir to Zaul, in which that minister entered at full length upon the whole bearings and circumstances of the case, showing the inevitable miseries which would attend any delay in obeying the Shah's commands, and particularly dwelling upon the royal intention of wreaking his vengeance upon the head of his son, upon whose praises he

* Chief officers of towns and villages.

did not fail to descant, thus playing upon a father's feelings, whilst he, in fact, indulged in the expression of the truth of his own.

This done, the papers duly sealed, and addressed with every proper regard to etiquette, were delivered to one of the Shah's own ghosams, who, well mounted and armed, was ordered to make the best of his way to the gates of Asterabad.

CHAPTER VI.

Truth among liars is like a true believer among infidels.

TURKISH SAYING.

WE must now return to the spot where the fair Amima and her attendant, in the utmost trepidation, had hidden themselves from the turmoil which had attended the capture of Zohrab, and more particularly from the observation of the Shah himself. Like timid gazelles, scared by the presence of beasts of prey, they had sought the seclusion of the deepest thickets, and there awaited, in all the agonies of suspense, such as can only be felt by Asiatic women when left unprotected and surrounded by strange men, the result of the desperate tragedy that was acting so near them. Their senses scarcely served in giving heed to

all that was said and done ; but, although they were much too alarmed to think of any thing but their own situation, yet when the words “ I am Zohrab ! ” said so loudly and emphatically that they might have been heard at a considerable distance, struck their ear, they almost instantly laid aside their fears, and lent the whole of their attention to all that followed.

Great had been the interest raised in the breast of the young Princess by the few words which she had exchanged with the unknown wanderer ; but the instant she discovered who this wanderer was, the whole of his glorious career, the reputation of his virtues, and the wondrous far-spread tales of his excellence flashed upon her mind, and produced a sensation which but too soon after she found had become the day-dream of her future existence. But at this present moment, when she had scarcely known him, and was about to witness his destruction, her agitation became so overpowering, that but for the fear of being seen by men which forms part of the nature of a Mahomedan woman, she would have rushed

forward to oppose herself to so cruel an act. Her attendant was not slow in remarking the interest with which the fate of Zohrab had inspired her mistress, and partook in an almost equal degree the same fears for his safety. When at length the greatest violence of the turmoil had expended itself, and they could perceive that the youth had escaped death, but was carried away a captive, their apprehensions were calmed, and their only thoughts were how they themselves could escape unobserved from the awkward predicament in which they stood. With breathless anxiety they watched the steps and the countenance of the King, when, through a chasm in the rock which concealed them, they could perceive that face, which scarcely any one of his subjects ventured to look upon, had been convulsed with every variety of emotion, from excess of joy to excess of anger, and they fondly hoped that in the contending excitement he might have forgotten that they were present, or, still more, flattered themselves that he had not seen them at all. When he at length moved from the scene, without making inquiries

concerning them, their whole animation was restored, and they could give heed more particularly to what took place. The King, surrounded with his officers, all glittering in arms of the finest workmanship, mounted on superb horses foaming with the animation of the chase, passed off first. Then immediately followed the prisoner, secured on each side by officers with their lances, in attitudes of great watchfulness. He was indeed an object upon which every eye might love to dwell. So perfect a model of beauty was he, of so undaunted though mild an aspect, and of such grace and agility, that, we will venture to affirm, it was difficult for the eye of woman to behold him in his present forlorn situation without feeling every sentiment of pity and commiseration, tinged by sentiments of a still softer nature. Will it be surprising, then, that the eyes of the Princess, secure as she felt herself in her retreat, were riveted upon the unfortunate captive, and that every moment of time so passed would fructify into an age of recollections, subversive of her future welfare and

peace of mind? Zohrab, who knew the exact direction in which the maidens had fled, did not fail to cast a scrutinizing look towards their retreat; and a certain thrill which he felt throughout his frame, as he thought his eyes met a corresponding look, unfolded to him sensations which till that moment he had never felt. We must here intreat those of our readers who may be slow in believing that love can be produced at first sight, not to judge of the feelings and temperament of Eastern people by those of the North. The veil which in Persia constantly and entirely hides woman from the gaze of man, forms a strong incentive to curiosity, and is a great exciter of the imagination; and perchance when a woman can do so in safety, she will permit man to enjoy a quick and casual survey of her charms, and thus frequently secures his love and devotion. But in the instance of Zohrab and Amima, the circumstances which brought them together were in every way the strongest promoters of the soft passion; and when romance is thrown into the scale, it may fairly be inferred that a violent

and ardent love might have been produced in both their hearts, and every rational person remain satisfied of the pureness and sincerity of that passion.

When the King, his prisoner, and attendants, had quitted the scene, and the solitudes of the desert were again left unbroken, the Princess and her attendant ventured with cautious steps to issue from their hiding-place. Having ascertained that no one was present and that no straggler remained behind to watch their steps, they first slowly wound their way through the rocks and thickets, and then with increasing speed returned to the intricate avenues which had led them from the camp. They did not stop until they had again reached the Princess's pavilion, where, having laid aside their veils, they had leisure to recover their scattered thoughts, and converse upon the events of the morning.

Mariam, who by the presence of the Shah alone had almost been deprived of her senses, and entirely of the use of her speech, had now in great measure come to herself; and as she

was in general afflicted with a great determination of words to the tongue, she felt herself greatly oppressed on this occasion, and began as follows.

“ Allah, Allah ! Oh, my Khanum, our star was a bad one when we found that odious road ! Allah grant that we may have seen the last of this adventure ! for if the Shah should perchance have perceived us, there is nothing else to do than to put our trust in Allah. On the other hand, *Bah, bah, bah !*—Oh wonderful, wonderful ! that was a beautiful youth indeed, whom destiny threw into our road. For my part, I was never so near a beautiful youth before in my life ; and who ever could have thought that we should thus have stumbled over that blood-drinker Zohrab ? Whatever they may say of him for the future, I will never believe any thing but good of him. Does my Khanum recollect his sweet words and dark eyes ! Astonishing fascination surrounded all he did ! It is well they did not kill him, for if they had, nothing could have prevented my cries and lamentations, and then we should have been discovered, and

perhaps shared his fate. Men are animals without compunction! But you, my Princess — how have you borne this adventure? In truth, the Shah in your hands is like flax in the fingers of the spinner — you can do with him what you like; but for your poor slave, should he suspect me of having drawn your footsteps to that odious spot, there will be an end of me. But, suppose he should still wish to put the unfortunate youth to death, shall we do nothing to save him?”

During this speech, Amima, lost in thought, and full of the many consequences which might flow from the events of the morning, had little heeded the various topics upon which her companion had touched; but the last words which struck her ear being almost a repetition of her own apprehensions for the safety of Zohrab, she could not refrain from taking notice of them.

“Heaven avert it!” said she in great earnestness; “I am tired of hearing of blood; my heart sickens at the thought of cruelty; will my uncle never stay his hand! Mariam, this innocent youth must not die! It would be un-

worthy of a king of Persia to think of putting him to death."

"That is just what your slave was saying," answered Mariam; "he must not die. But, Allah avert it! suppose he were now dead. The Shah looked in a vastly killing humour when he left that ill-fated spot; and if the poor wretch once falls into the hands of the unsainted executioner, there is no salvation for him."

"You have not heard any thing, my soul Mariam?" exclaimed the agitated Amima, not reflecting that there could not have been time enough, in the interval that had elapsed, for the King's return to the camp;—"you cannot yet have seen your brother?"

"No," said the attendant, who now could sufficiently perceive how strongly the current of her mistress's feelings set in favour of the captive:—"No, the King cannot yet have reached his tent, and it will be some time before I can speak to Sadek; but it is that horrid chief executioner whom I most fear, and who takes off men's heads before they can say a second 'Allah forgive me!'"

In this manner did they pass the morning, awaiting with painful anxiety the announcement of the Shah's arrival. The Princess in vain sought occupation ; her mind was too much taken up with the one subject to find amusement in her ordinary modes of passing her time. She tried in vain to embroider—she laid the frame on one side. If she took up her Saadi or her Hafiz, it was only to divine her future fate in a *fall* ;* hoping to be blessed with hitting upon some passage which might include the destinies of him who stood the first in her thoughts. The sounds of music were now harsh to her ear ; and it would have been worse than martyrdom had she been condemned to hear a tale, however well told, from one of the King's story-tellers. At one time she would remain near her pillow in a corner of the pavilion, her eyes fixed upon one spot, motioning her finely wrought cane fan backwards and forwards, evidently absorbed in thoughts totally new to her mind.

* A Persian mode of divination.

At another, with deep-drawn sighs, she would apparently watch the playing of the fountain before her, whilst her whole soul was absorbed in what had passed, and on what were likely to be its consequences. Mariam, whose love for her mistress amounted almost to adoration, occasionally left her, anxious to set on foot some mode of immediate information ; and returning stood before her, for long intervals, apparently unseen and unheeded. It was in one of those intervals, in the middle of a long silence, when every thing was hushed save the splashing of the water in the fountain, that on a sudden the discharge of cannon was heard. " By my father's soul !" exclaimed Mariam, " what is that ? the youth has been fired off from a mortar ! Oh, my Khanum, our soul is at an end."

" Silence !" said her mistress, starting up in an attitude of intense attention, her cheek blanched, her eyes expanded, her hand extended, as if wishing to catch a continuation of the sounds ; when, hearing a few minor discharges, she said with calmness, apparently relieved

from some mental apprehension—"It is the sound of the zambureks; the Shah has just alighted from his horse: it is nothing!"

Her fine face, which had lost for an instant the soft and timid expression common to it, again was composed; but it was easy to see that from this time forward she had lost her peace of mind, and that her character had all at once developed itself by this unexpected and impressive event: like some tropical plant, which takes long in coming to maturity, but at once expands into flower by the violent heat of the vertical sun.

It was noon, and having ascertained beyond a doubt that the discharge of cannon announced the King's return to his camp, she retired into a corner of her pavilion, and there said her prayers with renewed fervour—an act which, while it strengthened many a good resolution, tended greatly to quiet the disturbed state of her mind.

She had scarcely risen from her last genuflexion, when Mariam glided into the tent, and

stood before her mistress with a face which indicated apprehension.

“What has happened?” said Amima; “is any one arrived?” “My mistress has understood rightly,” said her attendant; “the Khajeh Bashi is sent to kiss your feet on the part of the Shah, and waits your commands.”

“Do you know what may be his business?” said the Princess, a slight crimson hue just passing over her cheek.

“As Allah is great,” answered Mariam, “he did not say; and to speak the truth, my soul shook so much with terror, that my tongue cleaved to the roof of my mouth, as I attempted to ask him.”

“Bid him enter,” said the maiden, with dignity and resolution.

The Khajeh Bashi, a man still in the prime of life, was an old and faithful servant of the Shah’s family, and had served Aga Mohamed with great zeal, although he dreaded the violence of his character with a feeling amounting to something more than womanish fear. He consequently preserved the profoundest re-

spect, not unmixed with apprehension, for his royal niece, who treated him with kindness, as she did all other of God's creatures, but who frequently resented the grovelling flattery and ultra-adulation with which he addressed her, by upbraiding him for it in the severest terms. He was a courtier of more than common courtesy, watched the uprisings of his royal master's countenance with all the assiduity of an astrologer calculating the aspect of a star, and had steered so successfully through the quicksands of despotic masters and their wayward tempers, that, like an experienced navigator, he almost felt equal to putting to sea in any weather. As to his appearance, (and that perhaps might have been the reason of his preservation,) his good star had made him many shades uglier than his master. The eye of the King was full of expression, and could throw out on great occasions more than human animation ; but this specimen of deformity had an eye which never exceeded the lustre of lead, excepting when he was under the bastinado, and then indeed it was full of fire.

Upon entering the pavilion in which the Princess was seated, ushered in by Mariam, he made the profoundest inclination of the body, having already left his shoes without; and stood in an attitude of deep respect until he should be first addressed.

“What news have you brought us, Almas Aga?”* said Amima, “it is some time since we have seen you.”

“As I am your sacrifice!” exclaimed the Eunuch, “it has not of late been my good fortune to rub my forehead against the threshold of my royal mistress. Almas is her slave, and only waits her commands to show her the excess of his devotedness.”

“I am always ready to see my uncle’s faithful servants,” said the maiden; “but what has brought you thus far from the royal stirrup? Certainly you must be come for a reason.”

“The representation of your slave is as follows: that the Shah (Allah grant him life!) has

* It is the custom in the East to give to persons of this description names denoting great value. Thus—“Almas Aga,” diamond lord; “Aga Johur,” my lord jewel, &c.

ordered me to approach the print of your footsteps, and to kiss the hem of your garment, and with words sweet as dropping honey, and compliments expanding as the vault of heaven, to inform you of his return to his camp, blessed with good fortune, and impatient to make the pearl of his harem partaker thereof. But in the sunshine of his joy there has been a passing cloud. This is the story, if your slave may venture to relate it."

"Speak on," said Amima, preserving all the composure of which she was mistress.

"This is the representation of your slave—that the Shah was pursuing an antelope in the very neighbourhood of these rocks, when, behold! his eyes were struck with the strange and alarming sight (saving your royal presence!) of a man speaking to two women. Naturally, the wrath of royalty was intensely kindled at seeing the corook, so long and so openly announced, that most sacred of Persian laws, transgressed in so barefaced a manner. 'Slay, slay on!' said the centre of the universe to the mighty warriors around him; and death was

about to be the reward of the transgressor, when, by the good fortune of the King, for the well-being of Irân, this individual cried aloud, in self-preservation, 'I am Zohrab !' These words, which indeed acted like the charm of the language of Gins, arrested the hands of the slayers ; and thus this fiend of a man was made a royal prisoner. But of the women the Shah knows nought—his wrath is excited—they can only belong to the royal harem. He suspects combination with the enemy ; he thinks spies are in his camp ; he vows vengeance. Such wretches can only be fit for instant sacrifice ; and but for the dignity of his unequalled niece, who is a second self, whose word is law, who rules through him and by him, he would ere this have rid the earth of all that is called woman in and out of his harem. He has requested your Highness, through your humble slave, to set on foot inquiries who of your Highness's attendants have thus transgressed, in order to send them forthwith to those whose office is death, that the world may be instantly rid

of such wretches, such ill-conditioned, such base-born——”

“ Hold !” exclaimed the indignant and courageous maiden, “ hold your peace ! Go and tell the Shah that I was one of those wretches, and that Mariam, whom you see there, was the other.”

There was a beaming in her countenance, as she uttered these words, which made her beauty quite resplendent. Her fear of doing wrong had triumphed over every other fear ; and although truth was not a virtue peculiar to her nation, yet she had made it the principle of her life, and she was determined not to abandon it on this occasion ; for, as by it she had principally acquired her ascendancy over her uncle’s mind, she knew, if she were to be saved, that the strict adherence to it now, independent of higher motives, would be her best line of conduct.

The effect which this confession produced upon her attendant and the Khajeh may more easily be felt than described. As for the former, she saw nothing but instant death before

her ; she fell on her face in an attitude of supplication, first towards her mistress, then towards the King's officer, exclaiming "*Ahi Wahi !*—Oh, woe is me ! what ashes have fallen on my head ! Oh, my mistress, why did you say this ? Why do you thus deliver up your slave, your own Mariam, to death ?—why, why ? After all, what harm have we done ?—how did we know a man was there ? O that he and his father had burnt before he had come hither, unsainted Mazanderani that he is ! But why, my princess, my queen, why would you not conceal the truth ?—who would have known that we were the women ? Others tell lies ; why should not those who have a right to do any and every thing ? Oh, woe is me ! we die ! the King knows not pity ! And you, you with an evil eye," turning to the Eunuch, "why came you here ?—you have turned the Shah's wrath upon us !—we are creatures without a fault ! Look at that angel," pointing to her mistress : "how can your odious eyes have thus dared to involve her in misery ?" She would have gone

on, but Amima stopped her, upbraiding her in mild terms for showing such fear of death, and more severely for her want of respect for truth.

The Khajeh, upon hearing the avowal of the Princess, exhibited an aspect which on a less serious occasion might be called ludicrous. He at first betrayed the greatest incredulity at her assertion, and with the zeal of a true courtier immediately set about combating it. "After all," said he, "have we not plenty of old women in the country? Let us choose two, and present them to the Shah as the culprits; nobody makes any count of an old woman." This more than any other argument he had advanced, roused the generous nature of the Princess, who peremptorily ordered him to leave her presence, and to perform the commission with which he had been charged. He then became greatly perplexed what countenance to keep; for he felt on the one hand, if the maiden were indeed doomed to destruction, he ought to treat her as an outcast, and make her feel the weight of his guardian office: but if, on the other, her great influence over the Shah were to prevail,

he ought to show her more than common devotedness. As he was making up his face between the severe and the obsequious, all of a sudden it struck him, that, were he to deliver the message of the Princess to her uncle, such would be the first burst of the Shah's rage, and such his incredulity, that it would at once fall upon himself, and "Allah best knows," said he, "how it may fare with me! He may cut off my nose, perchance my ears, or he may bastinado me to death." He then implored the Princess to recall her message, and again endeavoured to make her relish his doctrine of sacrificing two old women. But all his endeavours were in vain; Amima persisted in her assertion, and told him that if he did not immediately deliver her message to her uncle, she would convey it to him by some other method.

This succeeded, and he soon after left the tent, accompanied by Mariam, who, being a party concerned, took no small pains to explain the whole transaction from the beginning to the end, and even conducted the Khajeh to the turn in the rock which had led them onwards.

Amima, in the mean while, felt what a difficult path she had to tread. Hitherto her uncle had never relaxed in his affection towards her, and such had been the influence which she had acquired, that even in cases of much delicacy, in which she had interfered to suppress his violence and cruelty, he had ultimately given her rather an increase of his confidence, than allowed her to perceive any diminution. But the present case wore a more serious aspect; and as he was of all beings the most suspicious, it would require more than the common workings of a straightforward honesty, to allay the violence with which it was evident he was impelled, and to bring him to see the whole case in its proper light. She armed herself with a firm resolution not to swerve from the line which her conscience assured her was right; and having repeated many a mental prayer, and fortified herself with many an exclamation of "Allah is great!" "Allah is merciful!" she endeavoured to await the event with composure.

In the mean while, the report had got abroad among the women of the Princess's encamp-

ment, through the outcries and lamentations of Mariam, that she and her mistress were about to be put to death. This produced a scene of despair which no pen could describe. In a body, headed by Amima's nurse, they rushed into her presence, and there, in all the varied tones of cries and lamentations, appeals to justice, bursts of execration on the Shah, assurances of love and affection for his niece, oaths never to leave her, and appeals to the Prophet and the Imams, they made such a complication of noises, that it was long before the fair object of their anxiety could persuade them that all hope had not fled; and that the Shah most probably, when he had heard from her lips how little she and her attendant were to blame, would easily be pacified.

“What!” roared out old Leilah the nurse, “is that beautiful face, upon which I have gazed since it first opened its eyes, to be taken from us and delivered over to the executioner's gang? It cannot, it shall not be; may the father of him who can have even dreamt of such cruelty be burnt, he and all his ancestors!”

“Are we, who have eaten your bread and partaken of your salt,” exclaimed another, “to be now bereft of a mistress, of our Khanum, for the whim of an unbearded Shah? Curses be on his head! let him and all who belong to him go and parade their souls in jehannum!”

“Long life to our lady Khanum!” said a third: “whose dog is he who would venture to lift up a finger against her! After all, we are Persian women, and let us see the wretch who would dare to come within reach of our clutches!”

In this state was the encampment at Sawachi found, when Sadek, whom the Shah had sent forward to announce his intention of visiting the Princess, made his wish known to the guard to have an interview with his sister. The arrival of a messenger from the King of course produced a great sensation; but when it was known who that messenger was, the effect was favourable, inasmuch as Sadek, though a stern and inflexible man, had the reputation of being just, and moreover of being much at-

tached to his sister. He was, as usual, admitted to the confines of the serperdeh, whither Mariam had run to meet him with an anxiety bordering on frenzy ; and her numerous questions, made with a rapidity which prevented her brother for some time from announcing what the object of his visit was, all tended to show the extent of her love for life, and the vivid impression which the words of the Khajeh had made upon her imagination. She even suspected that her brother himself might have been sent to perform the last ceremony upon herself and her mistress. In vain he insisted that his serious cast of visage was common to him, and not at all indicative of any sinister intention, as Mariam insisted must be the case ; his words were not heeded, and although he assured her that he was not in possession of any instrument with which he could do the deed, even were he commissioned so to act, she almost determined that a certain swelling in the regions of his pocket must contain the fatal bow-string.

Having at length satisfied her that her fears

were unfounded, she gradually allowed him to explain the object of his visit. He said, that as soon as the Khajeh Bashi, in fear and trembling, had reported the lady Amima's avowal to the Shah, his Majesty, as the Khajeh anticipated, had redoubled the wrath with which he was possessed, and would have sacrificed to it the unfortunate deliverer of the message, had not the current been immediately turned against the chief tent-pitcher, who, as he asserted, ought to have explored every nook and angle of the rocks of Sawachi ere he ventured to pitch the royal harem within their circumference. He therefore immediately despatched Sadek to explore the nature of the outlet, as described by the Khajeh Bashi; to visit the very spot where the whole occurrence had taken place; to return and make a report to him; and also to announce to the lady Amima, his intention to pay her a visit the moment public affairs in which he was engaged would allow him."

As soon as Mariam had received this intelligence, heedless of every thing else, she ran

headlong to her mistress, and having now made herself as sure of life as she before had been of death, she showed by the excess of her joy the change which had taken place; and her example was so contagious, that all the women who before had rent the air with their lamentations, now did the same with their rejoicings, and one might have supposed that stark staring madness had possessed them all.

CHAPTER VII.

“Despots may rave, and tyrants may enthral;
But woman’s tyranny surpasseth all.”

THE whole of the following day the lady Amima and her attendants were in expectation of the Shah’s arrival, but the night closed in without his appearance. This delay was in no manner disagreeable, for it spoke more in favour of the going down of the royal wrath than any other circumstance; it being always remarked, that if he allowed the excitement and violence of the moment to pass away, reconsideration of the case was seldom productive of any great act of injustice. On the morning of the third day, however, it was formally announced that the Shah would positively arrive in the evening, and the proper preparations were made for his reception. But the noonday

prayer was scarcely finished ere a circumstance took place which harrowed up the feelings of our heroine to an unparalleled degree, and made her tremble to encounter the sight of him who was the occasion of her horror. On a sudden, distant cries and lamentations were heard, as if proceeding towards the Princess's tents, and at length they approached sufficiently near to ascertain that they came from a woman and her children, followed by a train of other women, who apparently, from the nature of their lamentation, (it being the death-cry peculiar to Persia,) were mourning the loss of some near and dear relation. The woman who headed the procession was in every way a striking object, of a tall and powerful form, the turn of her head and the expression of her face exhibiting wildness mixed with strong feeling. Her coarse black hair was dishevelled; her dress was torn and neglected; and her veil hanging loosely over her person, indicated a more than usual state of grief; and as she stalked along, dragging her children after her, ever and anon apostrophizing them as partakers of her misfor-

tune, it was evident that injustice and cruelty were the principal ingredients in the cup which adversity had prepared for her.

The Princess, who never allowed an object of charity or a person in distress, however low their situation, to be denied access to her, and was particularly moved by the genuine accents of grief which struck her ear, ordered the mourners to be brought into her presence. Mariam, whose heart had lately been awakened by a sense of her own danger to every soft emotion, made one in the mournful procession as she introduced it to her mistress; and as all the women of the camp, some by curiosity, others by sympathy, had come forth to witness the scene, by the time the complainants had reached the Princess's presence, the congregated mass nearly filled the tent and its avenues.

As soon as Amima could make herself heard, for the wailings and lamentations were continued to the very moment when the unfortunate sufferer had rushed forward to kiss the hem of her garment, she said to her, in a compassionate and soothing tone of voice, "Who are you?"

why do you mourn thus? what has befallen you?" The woman could scarcely be persuaded to rise from the position which she had taken at the feet of the Princess; and then amid her sobs, her cries, and her moans, she was heard to say, "I and my children are come to seek your protection! for there is nothing left us but Allah and you in this world. All is taken from me and these poor orphans! We, who were happy and blessed; I, whom all other women called fortunate, who walked with my head erect, who had bread to give to the stranger, in addition to that with which God had blessed our hearth;—all is gone! at one blow we are reduced to be less than the least, to be curs among dogs! Grief is our portion for the rest of our days, unless our Princess, she who is the refuge of the houseless and the miserable, takes compassion upon us."

"But who and what are you?" said the royal maiden, apparently much moved: "What is your case? what is the origin of your distress?"

The poor woman could not speak for sobs;

but several voices in answer exclaimed, "She is the widow of Aga Hussein, the chief huntsman, whom the Shah slew this morning."

"Allah, Allah!" exclaimed the young Amima, as her cheek flushed, and her eye beamed with anger, "in the name of the blessed Prophet! how is this? What had Aga Hussein done, what crime had he committed, to deserve so sudden a death?"

The widow, suppressing her grief, and roused by the Princess's questions, arose and stood upright, in an attitude as eloquent as the words which Nature put into her mouth. With one hand to her forehead, as if she were pressing the seat of her feelings, and with the other extended, sometimes towards Heaven, at others towards her children, she exclaimed, "What crime had he committed! Oh, my Princess, what words are these? Crime was foreign to his nature; he was an honest man; he first served God, then his King; his duty was his only object; whatever he did was in zeal for the Shah's service; he never disgraced the salt which he had eaten. He was one of the

oldest servants of the Kajar family ; he was bred up as a boy in their service, and his beard had grown grey with them ; when he prayed, it was to bless the hand which gave him bread. These poor children," (and here her feelings overpowered her, and she burst into violent tears)—"now these poor orphans—were bred up as loyal subjects. He never did a thing of which he could be ashamed, and his face, by the blessing of Allah ! was always white. But now, O merciful God ! where are those happy days, and what is my fate now ? Is it Satan, is it evil destiny, that has been jealous of our good fortune ? Hear, O my Princess ! hear what our crime has been. The Shah ordered a pillar of skulls to be erected. The deceased Hussein, with that zeal so common to him, did not rest till it was finished. I sat up with him all night, in order that it might meet the King's eye in the morning. Shall I ever forget the joy and delight of the good man, as he placed each deer's head in its respective place, describing how it was killed, who shot it, distinguishing by a flower such as fell by the

royal hand, and expressing his impatience to complete the whole by the head of a prisoner whom the Shah had found that very morning transgressing against the corook and your sacred honour and dignity !”

Here the Princess was evidently much excited, and she listened with the utmost attention to what was farther said. “ No,” continued the widow, “ no ; those last moments of joy shall never be effaced from my memory ! Well, oh listen, my Princess ! after our work we thought of nothing but of the ‘ Well done !’ which the Shah would be sure to say, and of the dress of honour which he would be sure to award the poor deceased ; and I left him as he proceeded to the presence, where he was anxious to announce the completion of the minar. What more shall I say ? My head becomes giddy ; I shall become mad when I think of what followed. Instead of my blessed husband returning home with joy in his face, decked with the robe of honour, and exulting in the approbation of his master and King, what did your poor slave see ? Oh, can I live to tell it !

Men came, children came, women came, all with a story—some with one tale, some with another—but all tending to one result, one horrid appalling truth, that my poor Hussein, that man without a fault, one of the King's oldest servants, had been slain ! Slain ! and by whom ? Almost by the hand of his old master, who had been more familiar with him than with any other man in his dominions ;—and for what ? Nobody knows : some say one thing, some another. But no, it was not the Shah—no, it was that wretch, that blood-spiller, that dog's son," (here the poor widow was joined by many of the other women,) "that ill-born dog, the Nasakchi Bashi ; he it was, curses be on his beard ! he it was who struck the blow ! The Shah disowns it ;—he it was !—blood we'll have of him ; we want blood ! blood ! we are thirsty for that villain's blood !"* Here the outrageous woman foamed at the mouth, her eyes flashed with fury, the action of her hands became excessive ; so much so, that

* The Mahomedan law is the same as the Jewish in matters of murder—blood for blood.

the kind and gentle Amima almost shrank with fear at the frenzy which the unfortunate creature exhibited.

Exhausted by the violent state of her feelings, the huntsman's widow was borne away in the most violent hysterical fit, leaving such an impression of horror upon the mind of her compassionate hearer, that she almost determined within herself not to see her uncle ; but when she considered that her only chance of doing any good to the poor woman would be to work upon such feelings as he might still possess, and thus obtain for her a recompense, if such it might be called, for the loss he had inflicted upon her, she resolved to receive his visit.

At the close of the day appeared a messenger, saying that the Shah was on his road. The Khajeh Bashi first arrived to marshal the women into their proper places ; the carpets and musnuds were spread, and the evening meal prepared. At length he came, and though but slightly attended, his presence produced a sensation of awe which nothing could suppress, and which might be likened to the instinct of smaller

animals that feel the neighbourhood of some large and venomous snake, without actually seeing it. In his usual visits to his niece he made a great distinction in her favour, for he never allowed her to stand before him,—indeed, such was the footing upon which they were, that he almost might be said to be the inferior, and she the person in authority, or the acknowledged superior; but on the present occasion he took upon himself a more distant line of conduct, put on a constrained look, and, as she approached, rather averted his head, and did not invite her to sit. Having allowed her to stand for some time in common with the other women, he at length dismissed all excepting herself, and then, in an undecided tone, desired her, though very coldly, to be seated.

Amima, who had betrayed neither pride nor impatience at the treatment she received, at his bidding sat down, but said not a word. After some silence, in which there was an evident embarrassment in the Shah's countenance and manner, whilst that of his niece was perfectly natural and unconstrained, he said,

“ It is true that I am your uncle—it is true that I have cherished for you the kindest and tenderest feelings—it is true that you have behaved yourself hitherto with wisdom and with prudence beyond your years, and beyond the knowledge of women ; but can that be true which you are said to avow ?—that you, niece to the Shah—his almost second self—the queen of Irân—the head of all your kind in Persia—should have been found almost unattended in the midst of the desert, and that too by a youth individually perhaps the most obnoxious person to the Shah and his state in the world ? Can this be true ? Speak. Our senses can scarcely allow us to think so ill of you ; and still we have yet heard nothing to the contrary.”

“ True it is, most true. I have nothing to deny. The King has been well informed, and it has been the humble wish of his niece that he should be so, lest the punishment which may be attached to the fault, if such it be, should fall upon some innocent person.”

“ And is this all you have to say in your own behalf ?” said the King : “ Am I to be satisfied

with this avowal, and with no explanation? After all, you have words at command, and such words as frequently have made me do what my better reason would have ordained otherwise. Why do you not speak now? The Shah is well inclined towards you; but should he be deceived, let your eyes be open, and beware."

At these words, the fire of virtuous indignation rose in the breast of the heroic maiden, and without hesitation and with much animation she said,

"Although I speak to my King, in whose power is my life, and who wields that power—whether in justice or injustice his own breast can best tell him—yet I will not fear! Deceit I know not—a lie I abhor—the whole circumstance attending my crime has been laid at the foot of the throne. Availing myself of the freedom graciously given me to wander at liberty over the wilds of these rocks, I did so, and by accident I met a man—and as soon as the consequences of that meeting were gone by, all of which are well known to the Shah, I returned whence I came. If innocence, total and perfect

innocence, be not written so broadly upon the face of my narrative as to be at once understood, then I am willing to be called infamous. But if the Shah will prejudge—if he will be guided by his own passion—if his first word be slay—his first desire blood—his sole ambition to surround himself with misery and execration, then let him add Amima to his victims—here is her life, and welcome! Beyond this explanation she has none other—she knows not what else to say—the rest is in the Shah's hands."

Had this been uttered by man with all the animation with which it was spoken by the Princess, it is not necessary to say that the whole being of the person to whom it was addressed would have kindled into an instant flame of violence and wrath; but coming from the mouth of a maiden scarcely ripened into woman, who inspired sentiments as nearly allied to love as they could be in such a breast, whose beauty would have given a polish even to offensive language, but set off truth with irresistible witchery, and who, moreover, had

made the influence and power which she exercised almost a necessity, it will not be thought extraordinary, that instead of wrath the Shah showed forbearance, and instead of angry retort adopted a meek and acquiescing demeanour.

“What words are these!” said the Shah; “cannot the King ask an explanation without being accused of wishing to shed blood? Cannot he inquire into the conduct of his niece, particularly when it comes before him with the suspicious character of the present subject of investigation, without being accused of surrounding himself with misery and execration? The responsibility of kings is in proportion to the quantum of power which they take into their hands. We take all. To watch over every department, great and small, is our duty; and though women cannot understand such a necessity, it is as much our duty to be suspicious of everybody,—ay, even of you, Amima!—as it is incumbent upon the watch-dog to take a survey of every one, be he friend or foe, who approaches the flock it has to guard.”

“The good dog watches, the bad devours

his sheep," said the undaunted maiden, a thrill of horror running through her frame when she reflected to whom she was speaking.

These words nettled the Shah, who began to feel that his niece was not ignorant of the death of his chief huntsman ; and from having been disposed to wave all further investigation of her interview with Zohrab, he returned with redoubled acrimony to the charge. " Once for all," said he, " tell me, the Shah commands it, what passed when you and your attendant met the Mazanderani. Did you speak to him ?"

" I did," said Amima, without hesitation.

" And wherefore did you ?" said the King, in great wrath.

" The man knew as little who I was as I knew him. He took us for peasants, I suppose ; for, telling us the history of having lost his way in the chase, and having slept under the rock where we found him seated, he asked us the road back to his own country. We warned him of the corook, and at that moment you appeared in sight. That is all that happened. Could we have done otherwise ? We should

have combated fate, and forced impossibilities, had we acted in a different manner; besides, we were too much frightened to be in full possession of our wits."

"And thus it was, was it?" said the King musing. Luckily he did not ask whether the stranger had seen her face; for had he, we fear that the veracity of the maiden, being put to such a test, would not have remained unsullied. Fearing this question, she now became as anxious to get rid of the subject, as he was desirous to avoid the horrors of the morning scene, and by one of those dextrous turns which she knew how to make when necessary to manage her uncle, she continued thus,

"And so the Shah has been pleased to imagine that his slave and niece, she who has been brought up under his eye, who has not concealed from him any word that she has ever spoken, or any thought that has passed through her head—that on a sudden she should have entered into a conspiracy with a beardless youth to do—what!—Allah only knows! The wisdom of the Shah, so famous in all matters of great moment, surely could not have discovered

any affair of state in this purely accidental circumstance. But if the Shah wants a pretext for getting rid of one who is a burthen to him, of one who does not sufficiently repay his bounty and generosity, then indeed he could not have seized upon a better: Bismillah! let him take her life."

"What idle words are these," said the Shah, "that you are throwing into the air? Has not my kindness been ever on the increase, and have you ever had occasion to complain of my treatment to you?"

"No," said Amima, "no! My face has, thanks to the holy Prophet! been ever white before you; but still I fear."

"How?" said the King, "wherefore should you fear?"

"Is it then unknown to you," said his niece, "that every living soul about you fears? Every one feels life insecure near you. Who shall not fear, when they see those who are your best and oldest servants fall? And shall I, an useless girl, one whose life is of no value, shall I not fear?"

Amima, who had begun this appeal rather in

a playful tone, finished it with all the feeling and solemnity of manner that she could command ; and its effect upon her uncle was that which she anticipated. Instead of the fits of fury which would have seized him had he been acted upon by man, he here appeared disarmed of all violence, and only exhibited signs of contrition. The soft and impressive manner of the maiden acted upon him as falling dew upon a parched soil, gradually softening that which was hard, and preparing for the production of vegetation that which otherwise would have remained a barren waste. “ Allah knows,” said he in a subdued tone, “ that my most earnest wish is to govern my kingdom with justice ; but kings must not be judged like other men. Men who are least open to temptation err—but, Allah, Allah ! Kings who live in constant temptation, what can they do ?” Upon this he made a long pause, and then, with his head down, appearing much moved, he said in a subdued voice, “ And thus I lost that poor old Hussein ! —Where shall I get such another servant ? Evil was the hour when the Mazanderani youth

came across my path. We have committed a crime, which but for him never would have been; we have lost a servant whom we shall never replace, and my subjects look upon Aga Mohamed as a monster of injustice !”

Amima carefully avoided any interruption to this ebullition of feeling; but when at length she thought that he might be acted upon, she said, in her quietest and most tender tone, “If my uncle would in some measure repair, by a deed of justice, what so much now afflicts him, he has an opportunity.”

“How, Amima?” said he, “how can I make that alive which is dead?—how can I restore that which is not to be restored?”

“No, that cannot be,” said the maiden, “but the living may be recompensed for the dead; the poor Hussein has left a destitute widow and children—will the Shah allow them to perish of misery and hunger?”

“Ah! is it so?” said the King: “it is well you have said it. Where is she? where are her children? Let her be taken care of: Amima, I place her in your hands. Let the

boys be well brought up; they are my property for the future. It is well you told me." He then sent in haste for the Khajeh Bashi, to whom he delivered his orders, that whatever the lady Amima might ordain concerning the widow of the deceased chief huntsman, should be implicitly obeyed; and farther, gave directions relating to the harem, which showed that his niece had acquired more influence than ever, and which made the Khajeh Bashi applaud himself for his dexterity in conducting this intricate affair.

The Shah continued thoughtful and serious to the last moment of his interview with his niece; and had she not known his character sufficiently to place but little reliance upon his fits of contrition, she might have hoped to have worked a reformation in him. At the close of his visit, his demeanour was marked with more than usual condescension to the women of the harem, for he left a present in money to be distributed amongst them, and moreover said kind words to those who were near him. As for Mariam, she almost lost her wits a third time,

for the King addressed her by name ; applauded her fidelity and attachment to her mistress ; and ordered that a dress of honour should be given her, as a mark of approbation for her good services.

It was frequently his custom to sleep in the harem ; but on this occasion, departure to the capital for the next day having been fixed upon, he preferred returning to his own encampment. He had no sooner mounted his horse than Mariam, followed by the other women, appeared before her mistress. Their hearts were too full of gratitude for the favourable issue of this visit, to observe the usual formalities upon approaching her.

“ Allah give life to the Shah, and to our beloved Princess ! ” said Mariam ; “ he himself, with his own mouth, spoke to me. What lies are those which would make him to be a man of pride and ill manners ! By the soul of our lady ! he is a Shah of great discrimination ; he understands how to seek for merit. He spoke to your slave for a long while ; related to me better than I know myself how good a servant

I am ; and ordered that I should receive a *kalaat*,* consisting of a vest of Cashmere shawl, a pair of brocade trowsers, and a new Ispahani head-dress."

Amima could not repress a smile at the enumeration of the various parts of her future finery, and said, " Did the Shah indeed order all these things ? I never knew that he was so well versed in a woman's dress."

" Why should not he, O my lady, my soul !" exclaimed Mariam ; " for indeed he said a *kalaat*, and what can a *kalaat* consist of but of these things ?"

" So be it," said her mistress, in a most affectionate tone ; " be it as you desire, Mariam. This is indeed a trifle compared to your kind services to me, to your fidelity and zeal ; and right happy am I that the Shah has distinguished you in this manner."

" He distinguished us also," said another of the women, with some little asperity in her accent : " we also are something. He ordered

* *Kalaat*, or dress of honour.

us each a handful of money ; and money from the King's hand always brings good luck."

" Yes, indeed," said Mariam, " the Shah has raised our heads to the skies."

" And what is more," said the Princess, with great feeling and affection in her tone, " the King has ordered me to provide for that unfortunate woman, the widow of the poor deceased Aga Hussein, and her destitute children. Where is she, that we may not delay to cheer her heart by the intelligence, and at least endeavour to soothe her grief for the loss which she has sustained, and which, alas ! by worldly goods can never be repaired!"

This news diffused joy among the assembled women, one half of whom immediately ran off to carry the joyful intelligence, and to conduct the widow to the presence of her benefactress. When she appeared, there was a fixed sorrow and melancholy in her demeanour, perhaps more touching than the violent and demonstrative grief which she had shown in the morning ; and when Amima informed her of the good intentions of the Shah towards her, of his

sorrow for the loss of so good a servant as her husband, and of the provision which he had ordered to be made for her, she appeared little moved, but merely expressed her gratitude to the Princess: the sighs which escaped from her heart, and the deep misery expressed in her countenance, being more eloquent interpreters of her real feelings than the most far-sought expressions. But when Amima told her that the King had ordered that every provision should also be made for her sons, that he had called them his property, and that at a proper age they should be enrolled among his gholams, the injured woman, instead of being elated at such prospects, seemed to shrink with incredulity at the advantages held out to them. “Allah! Allah!” she exclaimed, “it is better that they should dig, and eat dry bread in safety, than riot in luxury and live in fear of their existence. We also thought that the good-will of the Shah was all that was necessary for happiness. See where we are now! One glance from an evil eye, one stroke of destiny, has destroyed all! The poor, at least,

are free from this. Their condition is below envy—but they live secure—they have life, they have the sun, they have God and the Prophet for them; what else can man want! Let us go into a corner, I and my children, and there live unknown and unseen; that is better than the love of courts!”—This effusion, the produce of her misfortunes, but at variance with the common feelings of Persians, brought on a flood of tears, which greatly relieved the violence of the widow’s grief, softened her heart, and brought forward the most copious expressions of gratitude towards her benefactress. “God return your kindness a hundred and a thousand fold!” she exclaimed; “I and my children are your poor slaves, your rayats; do what is your pleasure with us! We will pray for you. May the holy Prophet, may the blessed Ali, watch over you!” She would have gone on for ever, but Amima stopping her, gave her the proper directions how and where to apply for the pension that was to be settled upon her; and as far as provision for the future was concerned, she had at least

the satisfaction of seeing the unfortunate woman depart with a mind contented and at rest.

The return to Tehran on the following day having been proclaimed, the whole camp, both at Sawachi and at Firouzkoh, presented a scene of busy preparation. The chief tent-pitcher, whose negligence had been pardoned by the Shah at the intercession of his niece, was seen actively employed with gangs of his men in the tent department, whilst the mule-drivers, with their string of mules, came pouring-in in all directions.

Our narrative must now take us into a distant part of Persia; and, leaving the Shah to return to his palace, attended by his minister and his brilliant cortège,—the lady Amima to resume her occupations in the courts of the harem, and to dwell in secret upon the beauty, the virtues, and the misfortunes of the Mazanderani,—and Zohrab to begin upon the torments of a lover's, as well as a hostage's existence,—we close this part of our history with this chapter.

CHAPTER VIII.

Whose dog are you?

PERSIAN FIGURE OF SPEECH.

It was in the dearest hour of the night, about an hour after the midnight watch had been set, when the whole population of Astera-bad might be said to be wrapt in sleep, that the sentinel of one of the towers which flanked the Tehran gate of that city was first struck with the howling of a dog. He had looked ever and anon at the moon creeping her way through the fleecy clouds which hung over the forest-girt mountains. He had mistaken the uncertain shades cast by her light for approaching enemies, and had found himself occasionally pulling his moustaches, or stroking his beard, to keep himself awake, when,

luckily for the credit of his watchfulness, his ear was struck with the above melancholy sound. On any other occasion it would have made no impression, but on this it gave rise to imprecations, in which the soldier not only sent this particular dog, its father, mother, and ancestry, to grill in jehanum, but all other dogs: an exercise by which he found himself so much awakened and refreshed, that he gained credit that night for being the most vigilant *keshekchi* who paraded from turret to turret. The dog being posted without the walls, it was impossible for the sentinel to get at him, had he wished effectually to stop his howl; he therefore continued to pour forth his maledictions, at the same time that he sought for him with his eye. At length, when the first dawn of the morning began to exert its powers against the light of the moon, he discovered the poor animal crouching near the parapet of the bridge, looking at the gate with the intenseness natural to dogs when they wish to be admitted. He certainly never would have deigned to give it a moment's consi-

deration, had he not been determined in his mind, when he met it in the streets, to bestow upon it some mark of his revenge for the torture to which his nerves had been put during that night; but upon looking at it, he was struck with its appearance, and fancied that it was something more than a common cur. It was a tall dog, of rough coat, in shape a greyhound, with a hairy muzzle, and very intelligent eyes under sharply-erected ears. "By my father's beard!" said he, "I have seen that dog before. Curses be on its great-grandfather! it must have belonged to some overdone ass of a Turcoman — may his liver drop! But, what do I know? — that's a dog which belongs to somebody: — may its home be ruined with that ill-conditioned noise at the bottom of its throat!" He was floundering on, through alternate guesses and imprecations, when, to his delight, he perceived the *onbashi* coming towards him with the sentinel who was to relieve him, and from him he immediately endeavoured to gain a solution of his difficulty.

The *onbashi*, or serjeant, was an old rough Turcoman, who had faithfully served the present possessors of Asterabad in the field of battle as well as in the field of hawk and hound, and who was as well acquainted with every dog in the country as he was with every private in his company.

“By your soul!” said the sentinel, who was an Asterabadi, “mine is dried up with the cries of that dog,” pointing to it. “As you love your child, whose dog is it, for I have seen it before?”

“Whose dog is it!” exclaimed the old man, as he put his hand over his eyes to skreen them from the rising sun. “Allah, Allah!” he farther exclaimed, having looked at it for some time, “it is Hemdum!* By Khoda, by the blessed Prophet, by Omer, and the Imams! it is Hemdum:—but where is the young Khan his master? May my child die if it be not Hemdum!” Upon that, raising his old cracked voice, he cried out to the impatient animal, *Hemdum! ai Hemdum! ai janem!* oh, my soul!”

* *Hemdum* literally means ‘one breath.’

The dog's ear no sooner caught these sounds, than stopping its lamentations, it began to utter those shrill, yelping cries which denote joy, and, although it was worn with fatigue, to make certain curvets, bounds, and uprearings, which indicated that it fully recognised the voice that called it.

“It is, it is the dog, and God is great!” said the onbashi; “but where is the young Khan? The dog without its master!—this cannot be, or the world is gone back. Let us go and see;—perhaps he comes: oh, if he does, what joy will possess the city, for his house were in sad distress about him last night. Come, let us go.”

Upon that, placing the new sentinel, and taking the other with him, they descended the narrow stairs which led from the walls to the gate, and, presuming upon the confidence which was placed in his experience, without asking permission of his *yuzbashi*, or captain, he opened the wicket to the anxious dog, whose nose thrust under the gate, and importunate sniffings, had long testified his certainty of the pleasure preparing for him. At

one bound he cleared the barrier, and making only one leap of recognition upon the breast of the old sportsman, he plunged off at his utmost speed in the direction of Zohrab's paternal mansion.

“*Wahi, wahi!*” cried out the old man, in utter disappointment at not seeing the animal followed by its master: “what is this? what misfortune has fallen upon our heads? As I wear a beard on my chin, that dog brings bad tidings. Dogs have as much understanding as half our men, and a great deal more than our women. See, see where it runs; it is going to the Khan's gate: this is an evil hour!” Upon this, he immediately proceeded to awaken his captain and explain his fears.

The faithful and intelligent dog, in the mean while, calling up all its latent strength, rushed through the well-known streets and bazars of the city, and made its entry into its master's gate just as the porter was throwing it open and performing the duties of his office. This old servant of the house, seeing a dog pass his threshold, its tongue out, its eyes

almost starting from its head, and limping with agony, stopped his sweeping and leaned upon his broom, to observe what might be the meaning of so sudden an apparition; but no sooner had he recognised his young master's favourite hound, than, throwing down his broom, he hobbled after it with all the agility that fourscore years had left to him, overtaking it just as it had entered the wicket of the gate of the women's apartments. Its appearance soon attracted the servants there, and the rumour that was immediately spread of the return of Hemdum soon reached the master. Zaul Khan had just finished the last genuflexion of his morning prayer, when one of the black slaves rushed in and exclaimed, "Hemdum, Hemdum is come!" Zohrab's mother, the anxious mother of an adored son, the respected Ayesha, whose ears were open to every sound, heard this announcement with the most lively emotion, and rushed into the apartment where her husband was just then rising from his praying carpet. Together, without proffering a single word, they hastily issued

from the room into the court. There, indeed, they beheld the faithful hound of their absent and beloved son, with just strength enough left to crawl fawningly, with wagging tail and with eyes upturned, to the feet of his master's parents; and as they dwelt over its wasted form, endeavouring to read into every look, and to divine the meaning of its piteous whinings, the lustre of its eye gradually decayed, and the palpitation of its heart gradually subsided, and they saw it at length a stiffened corse at their feet.

“What is this?” said the father, the dew-drops of apprehension breaking out upon his forehead.

“O Allah!” exclaimed the mother, catching the agitation of her husband, whilst her trembling operated as powerfully upon him.

“What does this poor beast say? What tidings does he bring?” said the distracted man.

“Where is Zohrab, Zohrab, where is my Zohrab?” screamed the feeling mother. “Oh, what a day is this! what ill-fated hour has come

over us ! Where is my son ? See, see his dog is come to die, to tell us of his similar fate. Oh, it is but too true !”

Zaul, in the agony of uncertainty, of superstitious fear of a bad omen, such as the one before him, and of sympathy in his wife's apprehensions, seemed to have lost all the strength and presence of mind for which he had ever been celebrated, and bent over the faithful hound, as if in his eye he could decipher what had really been his son's fate. In the mean while the whole household had caught the infection. The sounds of grief burst from every tongue with the most unaffected sincerity, for certainly never was mortal more beloved than Zohrab ; and one might have gathered from them that a calamity of no common nature had overwhelmed both them and the community at large.

Zaul Khan, having recovered from the first burst of his apprehension, had sufficient power over himself to leave the harem, and issue forth to seek for information upon the manner in which the hound had found its way into the

city. The first person who presented himself to his notice was the onbashi, who related in great detail every circumstance of the poor animal's arrival, and who did not fail to add his own speculations upon this strange event to the facts he had narrated.

“Allah is great ! Allah is merciful !” said the anxious father ; “ a wonderful event is this ! But where is our Zohrab ? tell me, men,” addressing himself to those around him, “ where is our child ? What is become of him ? is he dead ? has he been killed ? has he been seized by the tyrant ? Speak ! my head turns round in uncertainty.” And here this man, of an unusually firm mind, of great resources, of courage to scheme and to perform, cool in the field, ardent in council—in short, of qualities fitted both for theory and practice, was seen to succumb under the appalling fear of the loss of his only child—a child dearer to him than his life, for whom he lived, and in whose existence his own was identified ! Covering his manly countenance with his hands, he gave way to tears ; and in this attitude he remained, seeking relief

in mental prayer, and gathering his energies to meet the severity of the blow, should it be destined to fall upon him.

It did not require much time for the news of the morning to be spread throughout the city, and the palace of the Khan was soon thronged by his numerous relations and friends, who with unfeigned interest came to be partakers of his grief. They surrounded the disconsolate father, and endeavoured all in their power to divert his mind from the conclusion that his son was dead. It was true, they said, that circumstances told much against him, but still how various are the events of human life! Zohrab was young, wise, and full of hardihood—he might have been too ardent in the chase—he might have lost his road as well as his dog—very likely, before the evening prayers, he would be forthcoming: in the mean while, twenty youths had already volunteered their services to go in search of him, when, if he was detained by some of the Shah's officers, they would answer with their lives to free him from captivity. In short, so much was said in favour of his being alive,

that the willingly credulous parent gradually began to lay aside his first fears, and to hope all that his friends flattered him with would come to pass. But it was not so in the harem; there the impulse of their first apprehensions had acquired strength, and had so increased the lamentations of the women, that it required the presence of the Khan himself to reduce them to something like reason.

Zohrab's mother was still in the prime of womanhood, having been married, as is usual in Persia, at a very tender age. She had only borne this one son to her husband, and consequently her whole soul was wrapped up in him. Zohrab loved his parents with an ardour equal to theirs for him. He carried his respect for his father to the utmost extent; and his attentions to and care of his mother were unceasing. It will not be surprising, then, that her anxiety for his safety passed the bounds of plain reason; particularly when her pride, which was so much concerned in possessing a son already so distinguished, had enlisted itself on the side of her maternal feelings; for his name had gone

abroad throughout Persia,—he was extolled as a Rustam, his wisdom was equalled to Aflatoon's, and his beauty was pronounced more resplendent than Majnoun's. Thus her fears for his loss became uncontrollable, and she gave way to them with all the violence of eastern passion.

She had covered her head with a black shawl, and having seated herself with her face to the ground, was pouring forth her grief as if her son was actually no more. No words could soothe her ; indeed, all she heard from the women around tended more to encourage her passion than to allay it ; and so much had they wound themselves up to the certainty that Zohrab was dead, that they had already begun the funeral cry—but in accents different from the common cry, inasmuch as theirs was sincere, whereas the usual lamentation for the dead is one of mere etiquette.

It was in this state of things that Zaul Khan entered his wife's apartment, and seating himself close to her, addressed her in the following words :

“Arise, O my Ayesha ! After all, Khoda is great ! Let us hope that we are not sinners to such an extent as to have merited so severe a punishment. Be not thus cast down. Strange things have come to pass to-day, it is true, and a poor dumb animal has been sent to warn us of some heavy misfortune ; but must that misfortune necessarily be the death of our child ? There are many others to fear. The boy may have lost his road ; he may have met, and have been detained by the Shah’s officers ; or he may be sick in some village. There are, you see, many misfortunes to fear, besides the final blow. Rise then, my Ayesha ! show yourself to be the wife of Zaul. As God has hitherto prospered our house, so will he continue to protect it. Let us not invite his wrath by our unworthiness. We have, Mashallah ! friends—true and good friends—who will join us in seeking our lost child ; and be he on the world’s surface, we will, please Allah ! find him. Arise ! again I say ; go to the bath, wash, put on your clothes, and let us patiently wait God’s bidding.”

At length rising from her lowly position,

the grief-stricken mother once more sat erect, and looking upon her husband through eyes swoln with weeping, and with a countenance which would have melted the most obdurate heart, she said,

“Would to Heaven that Ayesha could hope as you hope ! But wherefore should the poor dumb hound come here to die ? Had its master been alive, would it have left him ? Any living creature that has once known him, can it ever leave him ? No, Zohrab is made to be loved. That form, that face, those eyes, that lovely mouth, are talismans which fascinate whatever beholds them. The dumb animal loves him as much as the speaking man. Then how must I love him, who gave him birth, whose existence is wrapt up in his ! O bring me some better tidings than mere hopes, which, if we trust to them, and they be false, will sink us lower in the gulf of despair than we are at present. It is better to know the worst at once.”

Indeed, so little anxious was she to be soothed (for grief once excited loves to indulge itself) that she rather encouraged than re-

strained her women from bringing every thing before her which might remind her more and more of her son. And first, his nurse, a famous *Gees Sefid*, or grey head, an old woman who had seen him born, and who had brought him up in infancy, walked in, bearing the clothes he had last worn. "Here is his *caba*," said she, uttering a piercing cry; "see, see, and here his girdle! Oh, Khoda! shall we never see him again?" "And here," said another, "is the shirt he wore when he fought the King's gholams, and here the blood which flowed from his wound!" Upon which they all uttered exclamations of despair, vying with each other who should show most grief. A ragged black slave then came forward, and exhibiting a new coloured handkerchief, sobbed aloud: "Woe is me! when shall we see him again? See, this was his present to poor miserable me, when last he came from the attack upon Demawend; he forgot no one!"

Zaul Khan, finding that he might as well try to turn the course of a river single-handed, as to stop the current of these violent feelings, had

sent for a Mollah of great eminence in the city, a reputed saint, to whose word he knew that his wife would be subservient, and who could direct the consciences of his household with as much facility as a cool steersman directs a bark when overtaken by a squall. The very mention of his arrival produced an immediate effect throughout the harem; and having been admitted to sit on the outward side of the curtain of the harem door, as is usual on such occasions, Zaul, taking advantage of this circumstance, stole quietly away to give audience to the Turcoman chiefs, and some of the principal men of the city, who had come to condole with him, and to seek counsel upon this important occasion.

It has already been said, during the course of this narrative, that the Turcomans were in close alliance and friendship with the governor of Asterabad, in his hostility to the King of Persia. Their principal tribes in the immediate neighbourhood of that city and its territory were the Yemoot and the Guklan, tribes rich in cattle, famous for their breed of horses, and highly independent in their manner of life.

It had been the evil policy of the Persian Government to despise them, to treat them with contempt, and to lose no opportunity of vexing them, and particularly of taking from them by every means in their power, lawful or otherwise, their finest horses and mares. This was touching them in the sorest place; and although, otherwise, they willingly acknowledged the Shah for their lord paramount, it was obvious that, if ever they had an opportunity, they would throw off whatever allegiance they might have paid him, and adhere to those interests which might best screen them from oppression. When, therefore, they found in Zaul Khan a chieftain as ready to disclaim the Shah's power as they were, and as able as he was ready, they at once sought his friendship, and in conjunction with him, opposed and attacked the Persian authorities with all their vigour.

The Turcoman chiefs, who occasionally resided at Asterabad, going backwards and forwards to their encampments on the Dasht Kipchâk, were Devéh Aga and Kior Aslan. The first was an elder of the Yemoots, and in his

hands the tribe had placed their concerns with Zaul Khan and the Shah of Persia. The second was a principal warrior and chief of the Guklan, and he also, in conjunction with his colleague, was intrusted with the interests of his tribe. Devéh Aga, or the Lord Camel, was a tall broad-shouldered man, with a complete Calmuk face, small long eyes running up into his temples, high cheek-bones, narrow below at the chin, a very scanty moustache, about twenty hairs sprouting from each side of the lower part of his jaws, and fifty or more from the region of his chin. His eyes twinkled with great brilliancy; and, although on the whole the cast of his countenance was good, yet, when roused into anger, he was said to look like a mountain cat. Kior Aslan, or the Blind Lion, was a more aged man, furnished with more hair than his countryman, which fell in a snow-white beard upon his breast, and gave him a venerable appearance not common to these people. He had but one eye, as his name bespoke, having lost the other in one of the many conflicts in which he had been engaged: which

gave him a fierce look, and added greatly to a certain quick and suspicious turn of the head, which was his constant habit, and which had been brought on by the watchfulness necessary to be preserved in those deep woods and thickets that form a belt round the province of Asterabad, when abroad upon a predatory expedition.

These personages held the uppermost seat in the assembly of notables who were awaiting the presence of Zaul Khan. In addition to them was seated Mustafa Khan, brother to Zaul, a man of noble aspect, with dark beard and overhanging eyebrows, whose steadiness in council was frequently well applied in allaying the too anxious nature of Zaul, and who was celebrated for his feats of arms. He commanded the Asterabad troops, in conjunction with Kior Aslan, who had the command of the Turcomans, both doing duty by turns. A fourth person was Mirza Shireen Ali, a celebrated scribe and penman, who acted as Vizir or minister to the governor, and who was known to manage his affairs with so much skill, that, although suspected of being secretly in the pay of the Shah, he still had

kept his post, and had a voice in the councils of the city. Many others, among whom were Mollahs and scribes of distinction, were assembled on this occasion, and all having clothed their faces with dolorous looks, awaited the coming of their chief in silence and occasional whispers. When he entered, they stood up. His face wore a solemn steady look: the resolution of keeping down the anguish with which he was oppressed, being strongly expressed in the contraction of his dark brow. After the assembly were seated, a dead silence took place, until Devéh Aga, the Turcoman, a man of few words, undertook first to speak.

“Zaul Khan,” said he, “this business is a bad business; however, God is great, and God is merciful! If our Zohrab is gone, what can we do!—such is fate. He is our child as well as yours,—he is much of a youth,—Allah! Allah! a wonderful horseman was he!”

“Yes, yes!” growled out the Blind Lion, who had ever been an ardent admirer of the absent youth, “the *Obahs** never saw such a Rustam before. God is great! But if he is

* Communities of wandering tribes living in tents.

gone, what are we to do? where shall we drive our heads to? The Turcomans without their Zohrab, of what use can they be?"

"If God has taken him from us," said the afflicted parent, in a scarcely audible voice, "we are the slaves of the Most High, and therefore must not repine, but say, His will be done!" In truth, we may say that not only Asterabad, but the Turcomans also, have sustained a loss; for he was the soul of our body."

He would have proceeded to discuss their public interests, but the task was too severe for him, and he closed his lips. The assembled party were too much alive to the loss they were themselves likely to sustain not to sympathise freely in the governor's feelings, and another pause ensued, until at length Mustafa Khan, in a more cheerful tone, said—

"In truth, everybody knows that it is in vain to struggle against our destiny—whatever Khoda hath ordained, it is the duty of every good Mussulman to feel, as well as to exclaim, *Allah kerim der!*—God is merciful! Yet, let me make use of a few words. Why are we to

look upon it as certain that our Zohrab is no more? Is it because his faithful dog came here to die? Allah, Allah! if we could read in the dying creature's eye that his master was no more, then, indeed, Bismillah! in the name of the Prophet! call in the weepers, call in the Mollahs, throw dust on your heads, tear your garments—Asterabad has lost the bright star which shone upon it—the tents of the Turcomans have lost their principal ornament! But, until we are certain of the misfortune that threatens us, is it not sinful to afflict our souls before our appointed time? Let not time be lost in useless grief, when much may be done in action. In the first place, it is imperative upon us to ascertain whether he be fallen into the hands of the tyrant, or not:—if he be, we shall know the worst; the tyrant, in one of those rages which are the scourge of our country, may have taken another step towards the eternal fires which await him by taking from us my nephew: but if not, wherefore should we entertain these fears? Animals, it is true, have more reason in them than man thinks

they possess—every day affords us some fresh instance of their sagacity ; but if Zohrab were dead, the dog would not have left his body. The dumb creature came to us for succour of some sort ; and be assured, that before long we shall ascertain what that is. In the mean while send some man of activity and discretion secretly to the Shah's camp, to inquire whether the youth be his prisoner ; and if he be, then we may know how to act. Better in that case to make any sacrifice, than to sit quiet under such a misfortune !”

Mirza Shireen applauded this speech, and added many arguments to prove how much there was in favour of the existence of Zohrab : which so much restored to Zaul Khan the spirits for which he was eminent, that he immediately took upon himself, with the unanimous counsel of the assembly, to fix upon the man who should depart the next day for Tehran, provided some tidings of the lost youth were not before gained.

CHAPTER IX.

A twister of ringlets passing by, "Oh, my soul!" said a stick, "could I but get at him!"

PERSIAN ALLEGORY.

THE day was drawing to a close; the high points of the Sandûk mountain were tinged with the last rays of the setting sun, and the shades of evening were fast creeping over the dense vegetation of the dark landscape that surrounds Asterabad, when, on the long causeway leading to the Tehran gate, was seen a small company of horsemen bending their way towards the city. The sentinel posted at the turret having given the alarm, the gates were immediately closed, and both curiosity and apprehension were abroad as to what might be the meaning of so unusual a visit. The

approaching party had soon been discovered to be Kizzilbashes,* from their black caps and their mode of riding; and they were now ascertained to consist of six people, with one led horse and two baggage-mules. It will be necessary to describe with some detail the principal person of this band, because he will serve for the prototype of a numerous class, frequently met with about the court and person of the monarch of Persia.

The *Gholam Shah*, or the King's slave, (for such he was,) is usually taken from the most respectable families of the country;—brought up from boyhood in and about the court, and early instructed in all the manly exercises—riding spirited horses, firing from off their backs on the fullest speed, throwing the jerrid, scaling the highest mountains, and, in short, fitting himself for being a guard to the King's person: he is the transmitter, and frequently executor of his commands; the dread of all village magistrates and city governors, as well

* *Kizzilbashes*, or red-head, is a nickname of old standing given to Persians.

as an universal terrorist to the traveller on the road and the peasant in the field. The approbation of the monarch is his first and leading object: knowing that it will lead to substantial benefits, he loses no opportunity of distinguishing himself; and having served a long apprenticeship to all the arts of extortion and exaction, when he is sent upon the King's service, to enforce a firman or to apprehend a defaulter, he is never slow in putting them into the most rigorous execution. Equipped in dress and arms in the highest style of extravagance, his demeanour is arrogant and presumptuous to his inferiors; and as his gains are proportioned to the fear which he produces upon those whom he is sent to visit, it may be imagined that what he wants in natural pride he makes up in artificial arrogance.

Such was the character of the person now approaching the gate of Asterabad. He was young and handsome; his beard just fringed his chin; long curls dangled behind his ears; and his eyebrows, strongly arching from an

aquiline nose, gave a peculiar character to his marked features. His dress was in the extreme of the Persian fashion; he wore his cap small, very much pinched at the top, and quite on the side of his head; his silken caba was fitted like wax to his tapering waist; whilst a fine Cashmerian shawl expanded broadly over his hips, and was drawn into a narrow compass in front, and being there compressed by the silver string of his handsome dagger, this ornament formed a resting-place for his hand, when he was standing or seated. When on foot, in his high-heeled green slippers, he walked with a mincing gait, as if he might be suffering from a sprain in the back; and when on horseback, he was either on the alert, bounding over the plain, reckless of impediment, his heel vigorously applied to his horse's flank, his hand out, and animation in every gesture—or slouching along with affected heedlessness. When standing before his superior, he would use those flattering forms of speech which are the current language of Persian courtiers; and when

seated with his equals or inferiors, he would take upon himself all those airs which his superior had been practising upon him.

Shir Khan Beg was his name, which he found could very conveniently adapt itself to circumstances, occasionally dropping the *Beg* whenever he wished to assert the *Khan*, and keeping to his latter title whenever he stood before a man in power. Having reached a certain distance from the city, he called a halt. Dismounting from his horse near a green spot on the road, whilst his *ferash* spread an embroidered saddle-cloth for him to sit upon, he said to his *jelowdar*, or groom, with a nonchalant air, “Aā Baba Beg, go on ahead—tell those dogs’ sons in the city, that a King’s gholam is coming, and order them to send out a *peishwaz*, or deputation—and hear me, if they say an unfit word in answer, burn their fathers!”

Delivering up the *yedek*, or led horse, which he had hitherto led in procession before his master, to the stable-man, the servant said, “*Be-cheshm!*—upon my eyes be it!” and clapping

his right stirrup to his horse's side, he galloped off at his fullest speed towards the city. In the mean while the valet, having prepared a well-dressed kalioon, which he had disengaged from the leathern buckets carried on either side of the pommel, with his left hand on his breast, presented it bubbling and sparkling to his recumbent master.

“What do you say, Hussein?” said he to his servant (for this sort of intimacy between master and man is common in Persia)—“will those wife-polluted curs in the city open their gates to us?”

“What can I say?” answered Hussein, as if he were a profound politician, shaking his head at the same time:—“after all, they are rebels.”

“Rebels indeed!” exclaimed his master; “we'll soon defile the grave of the father of their rebellion. The Shah, with one twinkle of his eye, will make their souls fly out of the first hole in their bodies.”

“Yes, you have ordered rightly,” said the servant, “particularly since we have got their Zohrab in our hands.”

“What words are these?” said he contemptuously: “What is Zohrab? Zohrab is dung. Give me but a fair *maïdan* (open space), a good horse under me, and a lance in my hand, let a thousand Zohrabs come, and you would see that one Shir Khan would laugh at all their mothers. Zohrab, indeed!”

“You have spoken rightly,” continued Hussein; “in horsemanship you have not your equal. The Asterabadis have no *maïdan*; their country is all mountain and jungle; where could they learn to ride?”

“Yes, yes,” yawned out the boaster, pulling up his moustache at the same time; “a Mazanderani horseman compared to one from Irâk or Fars, is the same as comparing a Persian to a Frank or a Muscovite.”

In this sort of talk they continued to pass away the time, until the smoke of the kalioon began to feel too hot to the inhaler, when he expressed his impatience at the prolonged absence of his messenger. At length the jelowdar was seen returning in all speed, and dismounting stood before his master.

“What do the dogs’ sons say?” cried out Shir Khan.

“I beg to explain,” answered the jelowdar, “that they received me with ill language from the top of the walls, and answered that they open their gates to no one, unless they first know his business.”

“I have defiled their fathers’ graves!” was the sole observation of the Shah’s officer, who immediately ordered his horse to be brought to him. He then put his dress into better order, clothed himself with a handsome *barùni* of crimson cloth for an outward coat, combed his curls, and mounting his *yedek*, or led horse, which was handsomely caparisoned, proceeded in person to endeavour to gain an entrance.

By the time he and his party had reached the city gate, the inhabitants, having been apprised of his approach, had lined the top of the walls in great numbers, the white veils of the women, wherever they were allowed to show themselves, appearing conspicuous among the black caps and dingy dresses of the men. The governor, having received due information of

this event, had proceeded in person to the gate, where he and some of the principal men of the city, with the Turcoman chiefs, had taken post, in order to be at hand to give proper answers to any proposals which might be made from without, and directions concerning the accommodation of their guest, should he be allowed admittance.

It was a matter of discussion who should take post on the tower in order to meet the first communications of the arriving messenger, because they did not wish to compromise their own dignity by sending too high a personage. At first they thought of leaving the sentinel only, then the onbashi, then the captain; at length, to save time and trouble, they determined that Mustafa Khan himself should be present, in order to prompt the onbashi.

When Shir Khan, riding forward, and leaving his servants a few yards behind, presented himself, these words were addressed to him —
“ Who are you, and what is your business ? ”

“ I am Shir Khan, a gholam Shah, and the bearer of a firman and letters.”

The voice from above answered — “ The Shah’s firmans are not read here.”

“ Then, as many as there are of you,” said the gholam, in a careless though spirited tone, “ you eat dirt. If you don’t open your gates to his firman, he will come himself, and send them and you to grill in jehanum.”

“ Let him come,” said the voice.

Upon this there was a pause, and the Shah’s officer remained in suspense what to do; the day was fast drawing to a close, and the idea of passing the night in an open country belonging to the enemy did not tend to cheer his spirits. He therefore thought right to lower his tone, and said—“ Is there no one among you who will come forward to speak to me? After all, I am a Mussulman—I am a stranger—there is such a thing as hospitality in the world, and you would not leave us to starve in the desert all night.”

The voice answered—“ Say what is the nature of your business?”

“ I have business, and business of consequence to Zaul Khan,” answered the gholam.

A different voice from the first, with some trepidation in his accent, was now heard to say —“ Have you any thing to say concerning Zohrab, the son of Zaul Khan ?”

The wary gholam immediately perceived the drift of this question, and said —“ Until the gate is opened I can say nothing. Be my business about Zohrab, or be it about Zaul, I cannot transmit the King’s commands until I know to whom I speak.”

By this time the impatience of the anxious father to gain some intelligence about his son had risen to the utmost, and as his allies, the Turcomans, were almost as eager as himself upon that point, it was agreed that the gates should be opened, but that the gholam should be lodged for that night in the guard-house close to the first gate, and not be received within the body of the town until the whole object of his mission had been ascertained. Accordingly, orders were given for the heavy bars which closed the gates to be withdrawn ; and as the grating of the hinges was heard upon opening one pair, so the same noise was heard

at the same time upon closing the second. The gholam was met upon alighting from his horse by one of Zaul Khan's officers, who conducted him forthwith to his master. Carpets and nummuds had been spread in a corner of the enclosure between the gates, where the governor, the Turcoman chiefs, and Mustafa Khan were seated. There was still enough daylight left for a broad gleam to reflect upon the assembled party ; but when it became too dark for social purposes, large lanterns were brought, and the scene was lighted up by the various contrivances common to people who live much in the open air.

Shir Khan Beg, who now thought that the moment had arrived for the display of his airs and graces, advanced towards the seated dignitaries with the affected superiority of a city fine gentleman over boors. But he was disappointed to find that he did not create the sensation which he expected ; for no one seemed disposed to rise at his approach, or to look with admiration upon his well-dressed and well-appointed person. Zaul Khan, seeing him ad-

vance, said—"Bismillah!" and pointed to a convenient place on the nummud; and when he and his company had slightly risen to him on their knees, he said—"Khosh amedeed—you are welcome."

The gholam having seated himself upon his heels, with his sword placed diagonally on his bended legs, looked around upon his company with an air of perfect indifference; then fumbling for some time in his breast, he drew therefrom a pocket-handkerchief, in which was wrapt, with much care, the royal firman, or mandate—a long paper rolled up, unclosed, and open to every hand; and having uncovered this, he stood up, walked to Zaul Khan, and carrying it first to his head, presented it, saying—"This is the Shah's firman."

The governor received it without any demonstration of respect, that is, without carrying it to his head; and waving the ceremony of immediately standing up and reading it aloud, which he ought to have done had he not been in rebellion, he merely desired the gholam to

be seated, saying, as soon as he had communicated its contents to his friends, pointing to those assembled, the answer would be communicated to him. With all this, it was evident that he was most anxious to inspect its contents, hoping therein to find a clue to the history of his absent son; but still his sense of what was due to his character restrained him, and he kept as firm and as unconcerned a countenance as he could.

“Have you no other news?” said one of the Turcoman chiefs, in no very courteous manner, and with all the roughness peculiar to their tribes.

“I have no news,” said the King’s officer.

“Perhaps you may have some letters to deliver?” said Mustafa Khan.

“Shall I deliver other letters when the King’s firman has not been read?” exclaimed Shir Khan Beg. “Shall I make myself an ass, and allow men to laugh at my beard? This can never be.”

“We want to laugh at no man’s beard,” said Zaul Khan; “we have only the present

business in view. If you have other letters, explanatory of whatever may be the object of your mission, deliver them, in the name of Allah ! and I am your guarantee that you will not be detained for an answer beyond to-morrow noon."

Shir Khan Beg, who all this while was negotiating a little more consequence for himself than he expected at first to obtain, seeing that nothing was to be gained by creating further difficulties, at length produced the letter from the Prime Vizir to the Governor, which he forthwith delivered. This Zaul had no sooner received than he opened it, and as he read, it was easy to see, by the brightening up of his features, that all immediate apprehension for his son's safety was at an end : as one may have remarked a mist portending a latent storm, at once clear up and exhibit a brilliant sky and a smiling country. He still strove to keep down his feelings of delight ; and with that mastery which Asiatics possess over themselves, a bystander and a new-comer, such as the gholam was, could

scarcely discover that he had been reading any thing but an ordinary letter.

But still the heart of the parent was not satisfied—it craved for something more to assure him of his son's existence; and therefore looking again towards the messenger, he inquired whether he had not omitted to deliver some paper which was alluded to in the Vizir's letter. Shir Khan would willingly have coquetted a little more, but finding that all deceit would be laid bare were he still to mask his game, he again produced a letter from his bosom, of smaller dimensions than the last, which he delivered to Zaul. Upon looking at the seal and superscription the countenance of the father lighted up into ecstasy, and no longer able to control himself, he exclaimed to his surrounding friends, "It is from Zohrab!"—"Aye Barikallah!" exclaimed one—"Aye Mashallah!" cried out a second—"Your steps are prosperous," said a third to the bearer of the news. "The *Mujdeh**

* *Mujdeh* is the present which it is the custom to give to the bearer of good news.

belongs to you, and welcome," added Mustafa Khan, the uncle. In the mean while Zaul had read his son's short epistle with mingled feelings of joy, grief, and admiration: of joy for his present safety—of grief for his captivity, and for the miseries which it was likely to bring upon his family and country—and of admiration at his magnanimity and purity of conduct. He did not give himself time to read it twice, but, calling a servant, bade him hasten to deliver it to his house (so a wife is called in Persia); and having done that, he turned towards the bearer of it, and said, "Sir Gholam, the delivery of that bit of paper has made me your grateful servant. Whatever I may be to your Shah, to you, his servant, I am sincerely thankful. I am sorry that the rules of our garrison do not allow me to receive you in my house, and that you must put up with poor accommodation to-night; but as to every thing else, you shall be supplied with all our city can afford."

Upon this the assembly broke up. Zaul and his friends departed to read the papers,

and to consult upon the proposals they contained, leaving the gholam and his suite to take possession of the guard-room, where they were to pass the night. These premises consisted of one small dark room, plastered with mud, and spread with tattered rugs which had once been called carpets—of a square closet, called a *cufsh khoneh*, or shoe-closet, and of a third room, which, with two or three stones set one upon the other, occasionally served to boil a cauldron of rice, and was called kitchen.

As soon as Shir Khan Beg was introduced into this place, he broke out into the following form of speech: “May the graves of the fathers of all Mazanderanis be sat upon by jackasses! May curses descend upon their beards! I, who am a gholam Shah—shall I partake of their abominations? See, this is a place fit for a Frank’s pig, and shall I get into it? Where are these less than curs, that I may do all that is most vile to their vile generations? Here, *ferash*,” he roared out to his carpet-spreader, “here, throw out these tatters to their beggarly masters, and clean out this dog-hole.” Having

thus vented his spleen at the little success which had hitherto attended the settlement of his own importance, he betook himself to inspect his horses, and to give orders respecting their night's entertainment. During this interval the guard-room had been swept out, his own travelling-carpets and bed had been spread for him, and he did not then quite so much despise his place of repose, particularly when very soon after appeared several trays plentifully covered with refreshments from the Khan's own kitchen, consisting of every luxury in the way of refreshment.

Zaul Khan and his counsellors having retired to his house, assembled in the principal hall, and there proceeded to read the Shah's firman and the Vizir's letter. The tone of the firman, which was addressed not only to the governor, but to all the authorities of Asterabad, including the Turcomans, was in every way insolent and tyrannical. It proposed the alternative of an unconditional submission to his power, to be marked by deputation or embassy, headed by Zaul Khan himself, which was to depart

immediately to the foot of the throne, and there wait the King's pleasure, or—the death of the hostage Zohrab. The Vizir's letter, written in a friendly and conciliating tone, confirmed the Shah's intentions, and advised a speedy acquiescence to his commands.

The indignation of the whole assembly was roused upon hearing the language of the firman.

“May the Shah burn!” said Devéh Aga the Turcoman;—“our tribes shall bury themselves in the sea of Aral rather than be subject to his tyranny!”

“Give me but a horse and a sword,” said Kior Aslan, “and we will beat a *chappow** in the very heart of Ispahan.”

Zaul shook his head, and thought of his captive son. Every one seemed lost in thought for some time;—their whole energies were paralyzed when they reflected that he who was wont to direct them with almost unvaried success was no longer amongst them, but a prisoner in the hands of their enemy.

* A chappow is a marauding excursion.

Mustafa Khan, who had not yet opened his lips, but who sat deeply pondering over their present circumstances, at length spoke. "It is plain," said he, "that nothing can be done until, by the blessing of Allah! Zohrab is once more among us. Every thing must be sacrificed to that object. Our arms and legs are broken by his unfortunate seizure, and their strength cannot be restored until the youth is released. War is now out of the question. But are we men without ingenuity? After all, we are not left without understanding. We must do by stratagem that which we cannot by force."

"What can thought do, when there are walls, towers, guards, and ditch, between us and Zohrab?" said the Turcoman. "We can do much in an open country, but this case is desperate."

"Hearken," said Mustafa. "We must accede to the Shah's proposal. We will say in answer, that an embassy shall be sent. It cannot be otherwise. We will all go; we will take with us all that we have—horses, mares, gold, silver, every thing; but we will make play un-

der the coverlid. Let us lose all, provided we regain Zohrab. But let us not forget that this Shah is an animal as cunning as he is cruel. He sits with his eyes open, but we must have more eyes than he. Zaul Khan !" (addressing himself to his brother,) "order your Mirza to write a letter to that effect."

Zaul, who had not said a word, but was wrapped in thought, at length spoke. "Mustafa," said he, "you are in the right. Let us all keep of one mind, and our business, with the blessing of Allah, will prosper. Allow me first to read you Zohrab's letter; you will thereby see what sort of a son we lose if we abandon him." He then opened the letter, which his wife had returned to him, and read as follows :

"Oh, my Father ! These few words are from your son Zohrab, a captive, who is threatened with death if you do not come and do homage at the gate of the *Khalifah*. He cannot venture to give advice to his father ; but this he can do : he intreats him to act for the interests

of his country and friends, and to forget that such a being as Zohrab exists. Oh, my Father ! forgive the faults of your son, who prays to Allah for your happiness and preservation."

"God forbid," cried out the Blind Lion, the Turcoman, "that we should ever abandon him ! If it be necessary, I and my tribe will go with you."

"But, Zaul Khan," said the Camel Lord, "if you go, shall not we, perchance, lose both father and son?—and then what will happen?—the Yemoot and the Guklan will remain without a cap on their heads."

"Make your mind easy, Camel," said Mustafa Khan ; "we are not men to lose our heads for want of a cap. We will write such letters by return of this gholam, that the Shah will remain satisfied of our intentions to execute his commands ; and for the rest, leave that to us. Zohrab will be saved, and Astera-bad and the Turcomans be more powerful than ever."

Zaul, who had understood by certain signs

from his brother that they were agreed upon some stratagem, now urged a separation for the night, recommending an early meeting on the morrow, when the letters to the Shah should be read, and they might send for the gholam Shah, to confirm to him by word of mouth what was contained in the letters, and forthwith despatch him.

The assembly accordingly broke up, and the Turcoman chiefs took their departure; but previously to retiring for the night, the brothers held a separate conference, in which they agreed upon the scheme they intended to pursue, for rescuing Zohrab, and again returning to their fastnesses and their rebellion.

The next morning, ere the sun had risen, found the same party assembled, with the addition of Mirza Shireen Ali, to whom the composition of the letters to the Shah and his minister had been entrusted. He read their contents aloud, and it was unanimously agreed that he had surpassed himself on this occasion. He had omitted nothing. Every image which the mind can conceive was there. The nightingale

of friendship kissed the rose of conciliation. Rivers of ink were made to run through meadows of paper, in order to create an easy navigation for the thoughts and sentiments of goodwill and affection. The steed of acquiescence was made docile at the voice of the royal command, and the embassy of humility was ready to put the foot into the stirrup of submission. The Turcoman chiefs, who were more conversant with the language of shepherds and camel-drivers than with flowers of fine writing, lent an attentive ear to the reading of this composition, and expressed their high admiration by frequently exclaiming with the others, *Mashallah!* and *Barikallah!* But when it was over, the Camel Lord, in the simplicity of his heart, said, "This is in truth very fine, Mirza Shi-reen Ali; but there is one thing I wish to understand. What does the letter mean?"

"Yes," said the Blind Lion, "that is just what I also wanted to ask; it is too fine for me to understand."

This did not in the least disconcert the scribe, who said, "We don't write to be understood;

Allah forbid ! No fine writer ever did. Franks only do that. Read the *Tarikh Nasserî*,—is that ever understood ? Read the effusions of our first poets, in which all the art of the writer is placed,—are they ever understood ? Inshallah ! there will not be a Mirza at the Shah's gate who will be able to understand such refinements as Shireen Ali can place before them."

The party being all of one mind upon their operations, agreed that the gholam should be sent for, and be made acquainted with their united intention to acquiesce in the Shah's proposals. When he arrived, refreshed as he had been by a night's sleep, dressed with all the elegance of an attendant upon royalty, and having been stared at, and, as he thought, admired by the rustics who crowded the streets, he uttered his "*Selam aleikum !*—peace be with you !" with a most jaunting air ; and seeming to care very little whether the party rose up or not, seated himself upon the nearest place to the master of the house which he could find.

After the first compliments were over, Zaul Khan said to him, " It is necessary for you to

know, that our intention is to put the Shah's wishes into execution without delay. We shall proceed to the foot of the throne immediately, and, Inshallah! when you arrive at Tehran, should you see my son Zohrab, as you love your own soul, say to him that we are well."

"There is no harm in that," said Shir Khan Beg, pulling up his moustaches, "if the Shah gives permission. Be it known to you that I, who am a servant of the crown, who always stand in the Shah's sight, for whom the King of kings has a ready condescension, perhaps I might say friendship,—be it known to you for certain, that I am a man not like other men, that I am one in whom confidence is not misplaced. It is on that account that the King of kings selected me for this mission. 'Shir Khan,' said he to me, when I had my audience of leave, 'you are a good servant; the King has great affection for you. Come back with a white face from Asterabad, and, Inshallah! I will do things for you! Those cows of Turcomans and those asses of Asterabadis' (by Allah! such were his words,) 'will only be burning their own fa-

thers the more, if they do not receive you with proper friendship and attention.' It is well," continued the gholam, "that you have determined to rub your foreheads upon the imperial threshold: you have done well. I will go to the King of kings, and, by your soul! I will tell him that I have done it all, and that you, Zaul Khan, and you Turcomans, are not in truth bad men, but when I explained the excellence and nature of our King of kings, that your understandings were enlightened, and that you agreed immediately to seek to sit under his shade, even as the reed seeks the protection of the chenar."

"Go and be blind!" exclaimed the old Turcoman chief, as soon as he had heard this rhodomontade. "What do we want of you? are you mad? Go take these letters; do what a courier ought to do; hold your peace, and get upon your horse."

This abrupt address to one of his supposed consequence, at first put the conceited Kizzilbash out of countenance; but taking a longer whiff than usual from his kalioon, and then

pushing down his shawl so that he might contemplate the beauty of his waist, he turned towards the rough liver in tents, and said “*Lebeh?*” or “What did you please to say?” with an air that might have rivalled the composure of a camel.

The letters were then confided to his care, with all sorts of precautionary injunctions relating to that which was addressed to the captive Zohrab. He received them with a protecting air, as if he were about doing the Shah a favour in taking charge of them; and forthwith took his departure. But it is most likely that he would never have behaved himself with the moderation he did, had he not been satisfied on the score of certain pecuniary gratifications, or *enaum*, which the Governor of Asterabad and his brother knew too well were ever the first preliminaries towards acquiring a friend at court, however insignificant in fact he might be.

We shall now leave Shir Khan Beg to make the best of his way to the capital. We shall also leave the chiefs of Asterabad and their

confederates to prepare for the embassy which, in the extremity of their distress, they found themselves obliged to send ; leaving it to the forthcoming narrative to show how it was schemed, how it succeeded, and what was its ultimate result.

CHAPTER X.

When the saddle of love is placed upon the back of thought, then the mind of the wisest man may be ridden until it be driven into the race-course of folly.

PERSIAN METAPHOR.

THE camp of Firouzkoh having been broken up, the Shah returned to his palace at Tehran, revolving in his mind schemes for the subjugation of Asterabad and the Turcomans, should his summons of immediate submission not be attended with the success which he expected.

Our hero Zohrab had formed part of the royal suite, guarded with all the watchfulness necessary for the security of a prisoner of his consequence ; and upon arriving at the seat of his future confinement, had been duly made over to the custody of Zerb Ali Khan, the Shah's Nasakchi Bashi, or chief executioner.

It will be necessary for the better understanding of our history, that the reader be put into possession of the locality in which the present part of it is laid, inasmuch as it will tend greatly to carry him along with Zohrab in the miseries of his captivity, and perhaps secure his forgiveness for any of the weaknesses which he might betray during its continuance.

The Ark or palace of the King at Tehran is situated within a square fort or citadel, of which three sides form part of the general fortification of the city, and the remaining one is within the city, being defended by a dry ditch, walls, and turrets, and entered by a drawbridge. Immediately upon passing the drawbridge and the gate, is a range of armourers' workshops inclosed within an arched bazar, through which the road passes into the principal *maîdan*, or square, entered by a gate which immediately faces the principal entrance, called the *der-e-khaneh Shah*, or the gate of the King's house, and which leads into the different courts, gardens, harems, and offices of the royal residence.

Entering the great *maîdan*, on the right hand

corner was situated the house of the chief executioner. Its gateway was in no manner distinguished from other houses excepting by its being thronged with hangers-on, and by the exhibition of a *felek** and sticks, which sufficiently denoted the office of its master. A rather intricate entrance led through a passage into an ample court, at the farthest end of which was situated the *dewan khaneh*, supported by pillars in front, where the master received his male visitors. A small door to the left opened into a detached court, which being passed, led again through a long narrow passage, terminated by a strong door, which entered a *khelwet* or private apartment. This consisted of a square court surrounded by high walls, on one side of which were a small suite of rooms, consisting of the principal one, which opened by a heavy sash of stained glass to the court, and of other smaller rooms for servants. This sort of apartment in Persian houses is often built

* The *felek* is composed of a pole and a noose in the middle, into which the feet of those who suffer the bastinado are introduced and made fast.

on purpose for the use of any additional wife which the owner may from time to time take to himself; but on the present occasion it was destined to be the future habitation of the hostage Zohrab. Adjacent to this, separated by a wall, was the principal part of the anderoon or women's apartments, the residence of the Nasakchi Bashi's wife and family, and particularly of his daughter, a person who will hold a conspicuous place in our narrative. Close to the whole length of the building ran the walls of the town.

Zohrab was introduced into his place of confinement by Sadek, who had continued to be mindful of his well-being, although his conduct had been cloaked by apparent sternness. The unfortunate youth had been allowed to communicate with no one else, and it had been difficult for him to gather from his uncommunicative guardian more than the common occurrences of the day. One thing, however, materially soothed his own misfortunes, which was the intelligence that the cherished object of his thoughts, the lovely Amima, had escaped the

effects of the Shah's displeasure for the part which she had taken in his captivity; and having once led on Sadek to speak of her, he wormed out of him many traits of her nobility of disposition, which he treasured up in his own mind with all the avidity that the miser looks upon his hidden gold, and which, added to the recollection of every look and circumstance of his meeting with her, formed the one and almost sole subject of his meditations. Frequently would he exclaim, "O my destiny! tell me, has it been for my happiness or my misfortune that thou hast made me acquainted with that heart-enslaver? Could she but know to what extent her lovely image has taken possession of my thoughts, perhaps she would pity me! But does she even think of me? Fool that I am to cherish such a thought! The captive Zohrab can never pass the threshold of her mind except as an object of commiseration—never as one of love. Ah! could I but see the outside of the first wall which encloses her fair form, it should be the constant object of my worship. I would woo it even as the

pilgrim worships the temple which contains the sacred object of his pilgrimage. But here, left to the contemplation of these four hated walls, what remains for me save utter despair? It is true, we breathe the same air, and our eyes turn towards the same heaven, and with that let Zohrab be for the present satisfied. O Allah! give him strength and fortitude to meet his destiny like a true follower of the blessed Prophet!"

In this manner did he allow the current of his thoughts to flow; and were it not for a fund of manly fortitude with which he was endowed, it is possible that his strength could not have resisted the violence of the anguish which possessed his mind. Sadek had studied his comfort, in great measure, by providing him with books, and otherwise giving him the means of beguiling the tedious hours of confinement; but what were such resources to one formed for enterprise and activity? His mind frequently turned towards his family, and he waited with anxiety the return of his father's answer to the Shah's proposal; but love, a pas-

sion quite new to him, had so entirely filled every avenue of his heart, that it almost absorbed every other thought.

It was in this mood, on the day after his arrival at Tehran, that he received a visit from his host, Zerb Ali Khan. We have already described the fierce aspect of this personage, but it will be necessary to enter into a few particulars of his history. In the beginning of his career, he had been a common *ferash*, or tent-pitcher, and had frequently distinguished himself in the King's presence by great feats of strength and activity, particularly by his extraordinary dexterity in administering the bastinado. He was then admitted into the *khelwet*, or private apartment, as a *ferash*, where he succeeded so entirely in acquiring the royal confidence, that he attained at an early age the important office of Nasakchi Bashi. He took to wife when young, the daughter of the King's butcher, by whom he had an only daughter, who, instead of marrying at an early age, as Persian girls generally do, remained at home to be at once the torment of his existence and his

help in the duties of his office. At the period of this our history, Zulma Begum, for so she was called, had attained the age of five-and-twenty. She was in person a true Persian beauty—large eyes of fire, bespeaking at once ardent passions and impatience of control—arched brows, meeting over a nose aquiline and prominent—a clear dark-brown complexion, which set off coral lips and brilliant teeth—hair in profusion, of the deepest jet, but rather coarse—and a form which, had it been confined within the limits of European restraint, although now fast spreading into coarse exuberance, would have been pronounced to possess the most perfect symmetry and grace. Taking her altogether, she was a majestic and awful beauty ; but the expression of her countenance might truly be said to be of fearful import. She might be called a fine specimen of the sibyl—of wild and varied look, and of fierce glances and hypocritical smiles. She at first astonished the beholder by her beauty, and then disgusted him by her audacious manner. With great natural abilities, she had acquired such an

ascendancy in her father's house, that the whole administration of it might be said to be regulated by her.

She superintended the servants and slaves, freely punishing with her own hand those who misbehaved. She controlled the expenses both of board and stable, and at times she acted as *moonshee*, or scribe, her compositions being celebrated throughout the city. Not satisfied with these private occupations, (unheard of in Persian female life,) she became ambitious of some more public employment, and she did not rest until her father allowed her a voice in the management of those punishments, and even executions, which it was the dreaded object of his situation to inflict.

Zerb Ali Khan, who had gradually acceded to all his daughter's extravagant wishes, at length was so entirely controlled by her, that he could do no one thing without her consent. He was very anxious to take unto himself a second wife, but a hint to that effect had so roused the violent passions of the overbearing Zulma, who loved and protected her mother,

that he was obliged to hide his diminished head, and quietly acquiesce in the protracted possession of his first, though now antiquated wife. The joy of his feelings when he received the King's commands to give his daughter in marriage to Zohrab, may be better imagined than described. He could dream of nothing but the acquirement of a new wife and the abandonment of the old one; and every moment which delayed his reaching Tehran, in order that he might communicate the King's orders to his daughter, seemed to him an age. When at length he announced the intelligence, her first impulse was outrageous anger, which prompted her to load the Shah with every epithet of violence to which her tongue was but too much accustomed, and then to attack her father for having ventured to acquiesce in any thing which had not first received the sanction of her consent; but when he urged necessity, which involved perhaps his very life, and when she recollected who Zohrab was—the hero of the day, the man in whose praise every tongue was busy—the violence which she at first exhi-

bited gradually gave way to quieter feelings, and at length she could perceive all the advantages that might accrue to the fortunate woman who should call Zohrab husband.

Under these circumstances Zerb Ali Khan first visited his prisoner; and as his future schemes very materially depended upon the captive's ready acquiescence, it will account for the conduct of the executioner, in smothering the real ferocity of his character, and putting on a courteousness and gentleness which were quite foreign to it.

"You are welcome under my roof," said he to Zohrab, as soon as they were seated; "such as it is, you are doubly welcome. I am a rough man, and one of few words, therefore do not take what I say for mere words. My house is your's, and every thing that is in it."

"May your condescension never be less!" said Zohrab. "I am grateful."

"The Shah (may God grant him long life!) has ordered me to make your life happy—to provide for whatever you may want; order me as your slave."

“Heaven forbid!” said Zohrab: “we are your prisoner, and dependant upon your generosity.”

“What words are these?” exclaimed the executioner. “You are a person of consequence, of unequalled excellence; a Rustam in power, a Locman in wisdom. Who am I, that should venture to treat you otherwise than with the respect which is your due? The King, besides, has all sorts of condescension for you. Are not you that Zohrab whose name has spread terror throughout his dominions; who, though so young, has shown the abilities of an old warrior, and put all our young men to the blush by your excellence? What words are these? Order, and see how quickly your commands will be obeyed.”

“May your house prosper!” said Zohrab: “We want nothing, thanks to Allah!”

“But, Khan,” exclaimed the other in a playful manner, “you must become one of us—the King, in truth, is a good king, and his service is full of pleasure and advantage. Why should a man of your superiority be lost to his

country? The King wishes to attach you to him. Every thing—honours, high station, house, riches, wife—every thing awaits you. Why should such a name as your's be allied with those of Turcoman boors, when it ought to stand foremost in the annals of Irân, and be allied to all that is great and good?"

"Khan!" said Zohrab with emphasis, "of myself I am nothing. God has made me the son of parents to whom I owe more than life: let my father order me to serve the King—so let it be, upon my eyes be it!—but, until I know his wishes, I must continue a hostage and a prisoner."

"That is well—there is no evil in what you say," answered Zerb Ali: "but what harm would there be in settling yourself with a house? The Shah has ordered that a wife should be placed at your disposal. Is there any harm in that?"

"May the shadow of the King never be less!" answered Zohrab, smiling. "Who will give their daughter to one so ill-fated as I am? Besides, I am a dervish—life has lost all its

charms — I am visited by misfortune. Give me a corner to sit in, and the vanities of this life will be my future meditation.”

“ Who will give their daughter to you ! ” said Zerb Ali, catching at the words. “ What words are these ? Your slave has a daughter who would kiss your footsteps, would you but allow her to approach your threshold ; and I should think myself too highly blessed to call you son.”

“ Are you pleased to laugh at me, Sir Khan ? ” said Zohrab : “ recollect that, ere this day closes, I may be no more. The thread of my life hangs by the frail tenure of the Shah’s will and humour ; and if my father refuse to accede to the proposals which have been sent to him, as he most likely will, your daughter, in espousing me, would espouse a corpse. There is uncleanness in the very idea. No, the thing cannot be.”

The chief executioner having thus sounded his prisoner upon the object uppermost in his mind, took his leave, full of hope, if not of certainty, that nothing could oppose the Shah’s

commands ; for he looked upon Zohrab's first intimations of refusal as of no consequence. He therefore went forthwith to give an account of his interview to his daughter, who by this time, having well considered the subject in her mind, had so exalted her imagination upon the happiness and advantages which were to be her future lot, that her impatience can be compared to nothing but to the raging of a furnace. She would brook no delay—she wanted at once to become acquainted with Zohrab, claiming her right to visit every prisoner, in consequence of the former permissions to that effect with which she had been indulged. There was a terrace in that part of the anderoon which Zulma inhabited that overlooked the small enclosure of Zohrab's apartment ; and thither, as a preliminary to her future operations, the impetuous maiden betook herself. Zohrab, after his interview with her father, had left the room to take the air in the court, and to meditate upon the strange situation in which he was placed, in consequence of what he had gathered from the

conversation to which he had just been a party.

“Allah, Allah!” he exclaimed to himself, “not very long ago I was as free as the wild ass on the mountain top, with a whole world of wood and brake, plain and mountain, spread before me for my pastime. Now, see me here cooped-up like a wild beast in a cage! Then, I have two alternatives placed before me—death or marriage! The man who, perhaps, will be my real executioner, threatens me also with a more lingering death, by inflicting his daughter upon me! Ah! were that daughter she whom Fate has placed beyond even the horizon of an expectation, who of a cottage would make a palace, who of a wilderness would make a paradise, then would Zohrab be content to forego all other worldly advantages, and be her slave for ever!”

In this manner did he allow his mind to run riot, totally unmindful that he was standing in full presence of a beaming pair of eyes, which watched his every look and turn with intense and inquiring eagerness. Zulma, wrapt

in her veil, had nestled herself behind a wall through which were two triangular holes, and there she sat with an attention riveted as Fate upon her victim. She gazed, with an admiration hitherto foreign to her heart, upon his noble and manly countenance, the expression of which was saddened by his misfortunes. She dwelt upon the symmetry of his person; she remembered every well-known tale of his daring feats, of his gallantry and generosity; and for once seemed awed by the presence of one whose very look announced superiority.

She who had never before allowed any passion to lie dormant whenever it was excited, here scarcely ventured to breathe, so entirely was she overpowered by admiration and respect. Love in its most violent shape was fast approaching to take possession of her. All those rapid advances towards the acquirement of a husband at a moment's notice were now checked, and she felt that, to obtain possession of the affections of such a being as the captive who now stood before her, she must make herself worthy of him. She re-

remained fixed in her retreat until Zohrab returned to his room, and then, unperceived and unheard, she stole towards her own apartment, a different person from what she had before been. Softness of feeling had usurped the place of impetuosity and hardness; reflection came in lieu of heedlessness and disorder; and a desire to make herself agreeable shone forth, where before she was totally unmindful of every thing but her own wilful selfishness. When she came next to speak to her father and mother, and her inmates in the harem, she was scarcely to be recognized—it was evident some change had taken place; for, instead of taking fire whenever any opposition was given to her will, she quietly acquiesced, and even seemed disposed to listen to advice. Thus, instead of urging an immediate personal acquaintance with the prisoner, she listened with patience to her father's recommendations to wait some time before she took such a step, as matters were not yet quite ripe enough for the immediate prosecution of the scheme, and the Shah's will must again be consulted.

The entire solitude which seemed to threaten Zohrab in his confinement, was broken by the provident attention of his friend, his secret friend Sadek, for so he may be called, who foreseeing all the miseries likely to befall him, had he not some living creature in the shape of a servant to wait upon him, had fixed upon the eldest son of the late chief huntsman, a boy of about fourteen years of age, for that purpose. This appointment, which was at first suggested by Mariam to her brother, and perhaps by the Princess Amima to her waiting-woman, gave the liveliest satisfaction to the hostage, who immediately saw how much more agreeably and usefully his time might pass with such a companion, than entirely alone. Ali, for such was his name, was a fine intelligent boy, very quick of apprehension, and more fertile in expedients of every kind than boys of his age generally are. He was the poor widow's favourite, and although she parted from him with the greatest regret, she was happy to find him placed in such hands as Zohrab's, particularly as she could

see him frequently. Since her misfortune, she had left Firouzkoh and taken up her abode at Tehran, to be near her protectress; and scarcely a day passed in which she did not receive some token of her bounty.

“Ali,” said Zohrab, “let us see, what do you know? Do you go to school?”

“I went to the *medresseh* at Firouzkoh,” said the boy, “and attended our old Mollah, who taught me to read the Koran, and who gave me some lessons in writing; but I have not been to school since we came here.”

“Why is that?” said Zohrab.

“My mother has been in constant attendance upon the harem of the Shah; and as we are new here, we generally go out with her.”

Zohrab, from what he had learned from Sadek relative to the death of the chief huntsman, immediately felt aware that the widow's visits to the King's harem must have reference to the object of his thoughts and affections and therefore his curiosity was immediately on fire.

“Whom did you see in the harem?” said Zohrab.

“We generally saw the lady Mariam,” answered Ali, “head vizir to the great Khanum, who did us so much good at the death of my poor father!” And here the child’s eyes filled with tears.

“And does your mother ever see the great Khanum herself?” inquired the eager lover.

“Oh yes,” said Ali; “whenever she has any thing to say, she sees her; for she never hides herself from the poor.”

“And when did she see her last?” said Zohrab.

“She saw her this morning, in order to tell her that I was to be placed with Zohrab Khan, and that the Shah had agreed to it.”

“And did you see her too?” said Zohrab.

“Yes, so please you, I did; for, although it is said that I am now almost beyond the *had takleef*, or the age of being permitted to enter the anderoon, still the great Khanum allowed me to approach her, and I went and made my *ser ferou*, or bow.”

“ And did she say any thing to you ?” inquired Zohrab, with increased animation.

“ Oh yes, indeed !” said the boy. “ She told me to behave myself well, for that I was going to serve a very great man, and one who would not fail to be a good master to me.”

“ Did she indeed say so ?” said the breathless lover :—“ Did she say so ?—did she say so of me ?”

“ Yes ; and moreover,” added the boy, “ she ordered me a *kalaat*, that I might appear properly and handsomely before you : and see,”—pulling out some money—“ she gave me this to buy any thing we might want.”

Every word which he had just heard from Ali gave a new turn to his thoughts ; and from being utterly hopeless of ever again seeing her, his imagination made him conceive that, through the means of this simple boy, he might bring himself to the notice of his Amima. This conversation took place at the close of day, and, hearing the call of the evening prayer from the minarets, our hero ordered his young attendant to carry up his praying

carpet on the terrace, in order that he might there say his prayers.

This being done, Zohrab followed. The view from this spot was confined to two turrets and part of the city wall on one side, and to the enclosure of the chief executioner's anderoon on the other; but, looking towards the main body of the Ark, several high portions of building were conspicuous, and among others a tower of considerable height. It was polygonal, and presented a picturesque appearance, as combined with the other buildings. On its summit was a room open on all sides, surrounded by lattice-work, and appropriated to the convenience of the Shah, who occasionally resorted thither to enjoy the cool of the evening after a sultry day. It was situated at one extremity of the royal anderoon, and might almost be said to look into the chief executioner's premises; for persons passing to and fro within the lattice-work might easily be distinguished therefrom.

Before he knelt down to pray, Zohrab looked around, and his servant followed his

example. The master's thoughts were too much taken up to heed even the presence of the boy, who on his part, both by look and gesture, seemed anxious to say something. At length, no longer able to contain himself, he exclaimed, " *Ahi, Sahib !*—sir, that is the place," pointing with his hand at the same time towards the high tower.

" What place ?" inquired his master.

" It was even there," said Ali, " that my mother took me to see the great Khanum. It is quite certain. I was quite out of breath when I got to the top ; and when I had done looking at the Khanum, I could see all the city round."

" Is it there where the great Khanum sits ?" inquired Zohrab, straining his eyes while he examined the tower, as if he could pierce its very walls.

" Yes, yes," answered the boy, " in this nearest corner, for I see part of the stairs ; and as I went in, she was seated just opposite, on that very spot. If you will look well and long, I dare say you will see her through the lattice-work."

“How can you suppose,” said Zohrab, with a most inquiring accent, “that the great Khanum can be seated there?”

“It must be either the great Khanum or the lady Mariam, because none of the other women are allowed to go there; and if there be any one seated in that corner, it must be the great Khanum herself, for the lady Mariam would never dare to seat herself in her mistress’s place.” Then looking up with great earnestness, he exclaimed, “See, see! I saw something move. It is—it must be the Khanum, *Wallah billah!* By Allah, it must be the Khanum!”

In fact, Zohrab, who had not failed to use his eyes with all the vigour and attention of which they were capable, had for some time perceived some one seated on the very spot described by the boy. It was a female form, and his imagination had already made it out as most perfect and fascinating. His eyes became riveted, and so long did he remain in the attitude of contemplation, and so totally did he forget his prayers, that he permitted the shades of night to close in upon him, ere he thought of descending from his terrace.

Having dismissed Ali for the night, he gave himself up to thought. Sleep fled his eyes ; he could see nothing but the form behind the lattice-work. To find himself all at once placed within sight of the beloved object of his adoration—to be certain of occasionally seeing her, and to think that so short a space separated them—threw his mind into a state of such strong excitement, that repose was impossible. He got up, he sat down, he tried a recumbent posture ; nothing could satisfy him but another view of the tower, in order to ascertain beyond a doubt that it really was there, and that his present thoughts were not a dream. He accordingly again ascended to the house-top, and enjoyed the tranquillity of the scene, gazing upon the tower lighted up by the soft gleams of the moon. The coolness of the night refreshed his heated temples. He now became more collected ; he recapitulated the whole of his past adventure, considered the difficulties which surrounded him, meditated with calmness upon the transitory nature of life and the world, and almost came to the resolution of

never more venturing to look upon the tower, so totally hopeless did his passion appear. But who ever followed the cold dictates of prudence when entangled by love? What mortal ever withstood the combination of temptations such as those which now assailed our disconsolate hero? He passed the night in watchfulness; it was only towards the morning that he fell asleep, and then only to be disturbed by visions the most opposite—at one moment to think himself entering the bowers of eternal bliss, at another to feel that the executioner's cimeter was suspended over him; again, to conceive himself kissing the hem of Amima's garment, and then to feel himself snatched from her by the orders of a bloodthirsty tyrant. Such harassing dreams, instead of refreshing, only unmanned him the more; and when Ali in the morning drew up the broad curtain that was suspended on the outside of his window, he awoke with a start, as if he had been called upon in reality to experience one of the horrible scenes with which his nervous imagination had been afflicting him.

CHAPTER IX.

He who would look down from a high place, must have a firm head.

EASTERN PROVERB.

THE lady Amima having followed the Shah to Tehran, returned to her apartments and daily avocations in the harem. She occupied one of the principal courts in the royal palace, which it had been the care of her uncle to ornament in a manner suited to the residence of the head of his house. Every luxury that could be devised was here collected. The great square, around which the living-rooms were situated, was planted with rare flowers and shrubs, and watered by a hundred fountains. Here were to be seen groves of cypress-trees; avenues of elastic poplars were waving to the breeze, varied

by the broad and spreading chenar ; flowers of all hues decked the angular walks which intersected this little paradise, and were cultivated under the immediate direction of its lovely tenant. A basin of water, constantly renewed by canals, was spread opposite the principal hall, from the centre of which started a jet-d'eau that produced a quiet and somniferous effect by the still splashing of its falling spray. As nothing ever interposed to disturb the quiet of this retreat, birds of every feather and colour had chosen it for their abode, and enlivened it by the variety of their notes, and the ceaseless activity of their comings and goings. Occasionally, too, the peacock threw out its discordant cry, giving a double effect of sweetness to the piping of the nightingale, which ever found the most effectual concealment in the dark shades of the cypress woods. In one corner was a spacious aviary, whose gilded wires and spiral columns retained as prisoners numbers of the choicest singing-birds. In the centre of the gardened wood, if it may be so called, was a summer-house of most ingenious construction,

made to open on all sides, so that the slightest breeze was sure to find its way into its inmost recesses, and to fan its marbled walls and terraced floors into a delicious coolness. Every object that was beautiful in the eyes of Persians was here collected, and the spot only required a Hafiz to sing its praises, to make its residence equal to the highest flight of their imaginary perfection.

The apartments, too, which the Princess claimed as her own, were so beautiful that they became the theme of admiration and surprise to all those who had been happy enough to see them. In that which she occupied in cold weather, carpets of the most costly manufacture, brought from Cashmere and Herat, were spread, bordered by felts of the softest texture from Hamadan. A corner of it was appropriated to the *courci*,* overlaid with a superb quilt of Cashmerian shawl, covered again by a silken cloth of the most beautiful Chinese

* The *courci* is the *tandour* known in Turkey. It is a low table covered with a quilt, under which a pan of hot ashes is introduced, and spreads an agreeable warmth over the persons of those who sit around it.

design. Around it were cushions of luxurious shapes, large enough for the whole person to recline upon. Covered with the quilt, those who surrounded the *courci* received its grateful warmth in the most convenient posture for repose. Upon the numerous *takchehs*, or architectural recesses, were arranged specimens of the most curious China bowls and vases, as well as every sort of the finest crystal and agate cups. The walls of the apartment were painted in the most beautiful arabesques, enriched with gilding, resembling those minute designs which illuminate the title-pages of oriental manuscripts, and which are peculiar to the taste and execution of Eastern artists. A lustre which had been brought at great expense from Europe by the Shah, the drops of which, when collected together into one design, looked like an immense diamond, was suspended from the ceiling, and added greatly to the effect of the whole arrangement.

It was to this place that the Princess Amima retired during the very cold weather, although she was seldom prevented from throwing up the

broad sashes of the windows which opened upon her favourite garden, and then, wrapped in the warmest and most costly furs, she sought that luxury without which no Asiatic can enjoy life, namely, the fresh air.

But in warm weather a larger and more open apartment was prepared for her reception, the front of which, instead of being enclosed by glass, was supported by two pillars, curiously carved and gilded, and shaded by an extended curtain, the ends of which were fastened by pegs to the ground. Nothing could be so charming as this place in warm weather. In front was a large marble basin, in the clear water of which were reflected the surrounding trees: on all sides were objects which contributed to coolness, and when the whole was illumined by the eternal sunshine of these delicious climates, the feelings which the scene inspired were those of unmixed delight and enjoyment.

It was usually in these apartments that the Princess received her uncle the King, whenever he honoured her with a visit. But from

his great desire to contribute to her pleasure, he had almost entirely abandoned to her use the high turret and the beautiful pleasure-house at its summit, the situation of which we have already described; and this was her favourite place of resort. She felt revived at the expanse of country which it commanded. The sight of a large city, always affording so much subject-matter for reflection, was interesting to her in many points of view; and besides, she was more free from the ceremonial by which her life was more or less surrounded, and which could not so well follow her up the tedious windings of the lofty tower. For she was daily obliged to hold a court, resembling in some measure that which the Shah held, when all the women of the harem presented themselves before her, standing each according to their rank, to whom she addressed some words of kindness or civility. In the tower she had collected her books, her *kalem* and writing implements, her guitar, and every thing which could help her to pass her time undisturbed by court intrigues or the disputes of her women. For she

took the greatest pleasure in reading the numerous works of imagination and of history with which the Persian language abounds; and she frequently enjoyed the visits of an old Mollah, one of the most learned men in Asia, with whom she conversed upon subjects much beyond her years. But to do good was her favourite occupation, and she passed a great part of her time in investigating cases of hardship and misery, in soothing the afflicted, in sending clothes to the naked, medicine to the sick, and, more than all, in interposing her good offices with her uncle the Shah, in behalf of the numerous objects perpetually coming under the lash of his displeasure. She was effectually seconded by her waiting-woman, and companion, Mariam, who, although possessing a very considerable share of the imperfections common to her countrywomen, had been so tutored into habits of kindness and considerate behaviour, that her mind became almost the mirror in which that of her charming and accomplished mistress was reflected.

Among the numerous objects of her benevo-

lence, one who enjoyed a peculiar share of the Princess's care and superintendence, was the widow of the Shah's late chief huntsman. By her desire she had quitted her abode at Firouzkoh for one in the palace itself, where she had been provided for in a manner that bespoke the deep sense which the good heart of Amima entertained of her wrongs.

It evidently had been at Amima's suggestion that her son was appointed to wait upon Zohrab; and on the day after the scene which we have described in the preceding chapter, the boy, elated with the kindness which his master had already shown him, returned to his mother to give an account of himself. "His master," he said, "had promised to become his instructor, to teach him to read and write, and to recite poetry, as well as to make him acquainted with the Persian historians." The confinement likely to ensue from his servitude, was enlivened by a numerous acquaintance of ferashes, executioners, and servants of all denominations, who thronged the gate of the Nasakchi Bashi, and who all took a great

liking to the boy : a friendship which, the sequel will show, he turned to the best account for the interests of his master. His mother gave thanks to Allah for her son's success, and prepared him to go before the Princess. Having decked himself in the new clothes which she had given him, his great desire was to be allowed once more to present himself to her ; and, such being the received custom after a gift thus conferred, his benefactress did not hesitate in allowing him to approach.

She was seated in the turret-chamber, a little before the call of the noonday prayer, when the boy entered, accompanied by his mother. His caba of silk, his new cap of Bokhara lamb's wool, his sash of cloth of gold, and his green shagreen slippers, had so taken up his thoughts, that he almost forgot to make the necessary prostration ; and he was only relieved from the embarrassment which his negligence had created both in his mother and himself, by the encouraging smiles of the Princess, who discovered at one glance whence proceeded his blushes and his tardy awkward bow.

“Mashallah!” said she, “Ali is all at once become a man! *Bah! bah! bah!* he must be called Ali Khan for the future; we scarcely can recognize him in those smart clothes.”

“May our Khanum’s shadow never be less upon her poor slaves!” said the overjoyed mother. “Let her forget our faults—the boy’s head goes round and round. We, poor folks! what are we, compared to the fineries of a court? all we possess is owing to our Khanum’s kindness. Our souls, our lives, are at her disposal.”

“Well, Ali,” said Amima, “did you go before your master?”

“Yes, so please you,” said the boy, who now had fastened his eyes with great attention upon the beautiful face of the Princess. “I went, at your service be it.”

“And how were you pleased?” continued the Princess.

“Mashallah!” exclaimed the boy with unre-served confidence, “he is a good and a fine man! he is a good master.”

Amima smiled, and looked at Mariam, who

smiled in response, and who on this subject, more than any other, sympathized with her mistress. A pause now took place, which allowed Ali to look about, and as his eye wandered in the direction of the chief executioner's house and of his master's lodging, he soon recognized the very terrace upon which he had spread the praying-carpet on the preceding evening.

“ Well, Ali,” said the Princess, “ relate how your master treated you.”

“ *Arzi mi kunum* — allow me to say,” answered the boy, and then, looking away from the Princess towards the terrace, seemed embarrassed how to proceed, his thoughts being taken up by something else.

“ Answer,” said the anxious mother. “ What are you thinking of, Ali?”

“ Answer,” said Mariam. “ Are you turned mad?”

“ *Arzi mi kunum*,” said the boy again; and in an embarrassed manner stammered out, “ But what did you command?” forgetting what the Princess had asked him.

“ What are you thinking of, Ali?” said

Amima, in the mildest accent. “ You see something below in the city perhaps, which pleases you more than this bird’s nest.”

“ *Astafarallah!*—Heaven forbid!” said the boy with much animation; “ but your slave thought he could perceive his master walking on the terrace here below.”

The Princess visibly turned pale at this disclosure, and then as quickly was suffused with blushes to the very eyes. She could not refrain looking in the direction pointed out by the boy, and there indeed she plainly perceived Zohrab. He was standing with his face towards her, as immoveable as a statue. Although she had only seen him once for a few minutes, at their first interview in the desert, his air and form were as familiar to her as if she were intimate with him, so much had she accustomed her thoughts to dwell upon his image. She could not look at him for more than a glance at a time; but as soon as she had dismissed the widow and her son, and was left alone with her confidant, she gave free scope to her eyes, and did not cease to gaze at the unfortunate

youth, secure in the distance which separated them.

“It is even he,” said she to Mariam, after a long pause.

“There is no doubt of that,” said the confidant. “How much my heart burns when I consider his situation!”

“What shall we do to restore him to his parents?” said the Princess in an accent of deep feeling. “Can we see the unfortunate, and not try to soothe his misfortunes?—It is our duty to soothe them; that is the true hospitality enjoined by the Prophet.”

Little did she know the real state of her heart when she said this. No doubt she felt all she expressed at the time, but little did she foresee the pangs it would cost her, were her intercessions with the Shah to that effect successful. She had hitherto never clearly defined in her mind the sentiment which she felt for him. She took it for pity, and acted up to the principles which that feeling inspired, fully aware how incumbent upon her was the duty of succouring the oppressed and unfortunate.

But in so doing, she felt a heaviness of heart, totally different from that alacrity, that cheerfulness, which ever accompanied her usual acts of charity and kindness; and she could not account to herself why she so felt. However, she pursued what she thought to be the impulse of her heart, and determined, on the very first visit which her uncle might make her, to entreat him to release his prisoner. This took place very soon; for on the evening of the next day she received an intimation that the King would take his *sham*, or evening's meal, in the anderoon, and pass the evening in her company.

Accordingly he came. The weather had long been warm enough to enjoy the open air, even after sunset, and the royal meal was spread in the dewan khaneh, where, after it had been despatched with all the accustomed ceremonial, the Shah ordered his niece to be seated.

Having talked upon indifferent subjects for some time, Amima at length ventured to touch upon the subject of Zohrab's confinement.

“I have one supplication to make,” said she

“I am but a woman, it is true, and know nothing of state affairs ; but this I know, that no King can do wrong who makes clemency one of the leading principles of his conduct.”

“Speak,” said the King, whose face bespoke as much good-humour as it was possible for it to show ; for whenever he visited his niece it was remarked, that it was in order either to enjoy the good-humour of which he was at that moment in actual possession, or to seek it. He was now in actual possession.

“Speak,” said he ; “there is no harm in that.”

“My supplication is this,” said the Princess : “that you no longer separate a son from his parents—that you release from captivity an innocent man—that you behave towards him as a great King ought, with magnanimity, and trust in his honour that he no more disturbs Irân—in short, that you set Zohrab Khan at liberty.”

“My niece,” said the Shah, without acrimony, “are you mad ? Do you not reflect that by letting this young hot-head loose, I lay the train for future bloodshed, and for all those mischiefs which you so constantly wish to

avoid? Never, my niece, lay aside this leading rule for a statesman; let it be the guide of your reason in deciding matters of general import; it is one which some give to Zerdusht, although others say it came from the Chinese Confutzee. It is, 'never to let the heart take the lead of the understanding.' It may seem harsh, but in the end its results are the most charitable."

"It is good, if well applied," said Amima; "but, if abused, is only an apology for the greatest cruelty."

The Shah, perhaps not wishing to perceive how strongly this applied to his own conduct, continued. "But our intentions towards Zohrab are friendly. He is a man of merit, and the hand of protection shall be extended towards him. Steps shall be taken to attach him to our government. We have ordered that he be treated with kindness and respect; moreover we have ordered that a house be given him; and to attach him more to our service, that he receive a wife at our hands."

Amima was in no manner prepared for such a result to her application, and, had she not

turned away her head, the rush of confusion to her face would have betrayed her feelings. In vain she attempted to compose her looks, and to assume an air of indifference; the shock of such a piece of intelligence was too great for her feelings, and she remained intensely agitated.

At this moment, very opportunely, entered the Khajeh Bashi, who having made his prostrations, and leaving his shoes at a distance, stood by the brink of the basin of water.

“What has happened?” said the Shah.

“I am your sacrifice,” said the Khajeh; “I went and saw.”

“What sort of a person is she?” continued the Shah.

“As I am the slave of the asylum of the world, she is not bad. I will not lie; on the contrary, I will say the truth. She is a fine person—eyes large, waist small, body tall.”

“What is her name?” said the King.

“At the service of the King of kings, Zulma.”

“Did you say that it was our intention to marry her to the hostage?” said the Shah.

“Yes, as I am your slave,” answered the Khajeh.”

“What said she?” said the King.

“She said, as I am your slave, ‘Upon my eyes, upon my head be it! we kiss the dust of your footsteps—we are grateful. Whatever the Shah commands, even unto death, we are ready!’ She said thus much.”

“There is no harm in that,” said the Shah. “Well, now go to the Hajji,” (for so he usually called Hajji Ibrahim, his prime minister,) “and tell him all that you have seen and heard, and forthwith order him to lay our commands upon the Mazanderani youth, that he take this woman to wife. Let his head touch the skies with this information; and as soon as the wedding shall have been celebrated, let him be brought before us. Our condescension shall await him.”

“Upon my eyes be it!” said the courteous eunuch; and bowing his lowest prostration, straight left the presence.

Amima by this time had been able to overcome her confusion, although she had learned things the most inimical to her peace of mind.

She had learned who was her rival. The name of Zulma, the most hated woman in Tehran, had come upon her like a bolt from heaven ; her whole frame was thrown into a state of revulsion ; her ideas became so confused that she could scarcely listen with common attention to what the Shah said ; and she would instantly have left his presence, had she not been afraid to commit herself before him.

“ Now you have seen,” said the Shah, “ to what extent our condescension to Zohrab reaches. He marries the daughter of our chief executioner, a person whose hand would be coveted by the first men of my gate.”

“ Yes,” said the Princess, almost mechanically.

“ Is that all you say ?” exclaimed the Shah : “ We expected to have made our face white before you, for having shown so much kindness to one who expects death.”

“ God only knows,” said the broken-spirited maiden, “ what is good or what is bad ! We are the beings of his bounty, blind until he openeth our eyes, and ignorant of what is best

for us. Allah grant that all the Shah does may advance his glory !”

The Shah was surprised at this language, thinking in reality that he had performed a feat for which he deserved to be placed on the same musnud as Noushirvan the Just. His suspicious nature would have taken the alarm, and he probably would have read the heart of his niece in its true meaning, had not her serious interposition for the dismissal of Zohrab effectually lulled any suspicion. Besides, he was so much in the habit of submitting himself to her entreaties, whenever she pleaded the cause of the offender, that he was delighted to find that on this occasion he had been allowed to come off victorious. But it must not be forgotten, that, had any other person in his dominions ventured to call his acts into question, the being now apparently so docile and accommodating, would have been roused into one more resembling the beast of prey than one possessed of reason.

After he had passed his usual time in the company of his niece, whose impatience for his

absence began to be almost perceptible, he arose, and returned to his own apartments.

When the maiden was left to herself, she gave way to a violent flood of tears; for then all at once was revealed to her, in a manner not to be misunderstood, the strength and intensity of her love for the unfortunate Zohrab; then she discovered that what she took for pity was affection; and that when she intended to secure his freedom and absence, she had, in fact, deceived herself by supposing it a hollow act of benevolence.

“Oh, woe is me!” she exclaimed. “Oh, Zohrab, Zohrab, why did I ever know thee! Cruel, cruel *takdeer*! to make a being once so happy as I was, now so wretched! See thy works! One man there is in the world whom I could love unto death, and he is given to the one woman in the world whom all hate!” Upon this, as if anxious to steal from her own reflections, she made her way to the turret-top, and there took her station. The first object which met her eager eyes was Zohrab, standing on the terrace of his house, apparently looking towards her. The light of the moon shone so brilliantly upon him, that it was impossible

to mistake him ; and could their respective thoughts and feelings have met in the intervening air, there, very probably, would have taken place that spiritual communication which may be the portion of the blessed in another and a more refined state of being.

Amima had not remained long in the turret ere she was joined by her confidant, who, having missed the Princess at the usual time of going to rest, sought her where she was wont to repair. Her quick eye soon informed her how she was employed. Hitherto she had never been aware of the full extent of her mistress's feelings for the captive ; but now her eyes were completely opened. Amima had refrained from making any confidence on that subject to Mariam, and she now was more cautious than ever how she mentioned him ; but Mariam had become convinced that her affections were deeply engaged, and consequently her conduct was much guided by that conviction.

As soon as Amima perceived her attendant standing before her, she abruptly returned to her apartment, scarcely uttering a word. She hastened the business of preparing for rest as

much as possible, and as soon as she had got rid of her attendant's services, and was left to herself, gave way to the current of her thoughts. She then seriously considered the respective situations of herself and her lover; and the result was the total hopelessness of a passion, which, if continued to be entertained, must end in their ruin and misery. It was long before she could take courage to throw from her mind the pleasing illusion of ultimately being united to him for whom she could lay down her life. She soon recollected the situation of constraint in which a Persian maiden is placed, both by religion and propriety, and particularly one in her peculiar circumstances. Zohrab, it is true, was eligible, in point of birth and station, to the possession of her hand; but the question was, would her uncle ever think him so? This became a matter of doubt, and she could not help clinging to the hope that some event might take place to bring about the former friendship which had existed between Zohrab's father and her uncle. Then, on a sudden, reprehending herself for entertaining such feelings, she exclaimed, "But what do I say?"

Who am I that he should ever think of me?—perhaps in his eyes I may be less than the dust of the field.” This train of thought led her to form new resolutions to regain her self-possession, and she determined again to persuade the Shah to restore him to his parents, as the best means, at once, to perform an act of justice, and to relieve herself from the neighbourhood of a temptation hurtful to the rectitude of her conduct and to the quiet of her mind.

But my gentle readers, if ever they have been caught in the snare in which our heroine was entangled, will not require from her more heroism than our frail natures can well endure, and will forgive her for that vacillation of feeling which must inevitably ensue, (excepting in minds of a higher order,) when inclination is placed on one side and a sense of duty on the other; and in that state we must for the present leave her, requesting the reader also to bear in mind that her confidant, now fully in possession of her secret, loving her mistress above all things, and favourably inclined to the object of her affections, did all to advance, and nothing to repress, what she deemed to be the ardent object of her wishes.

CHAPTER XII.

When men are vile and tempers hot,
Then look for plot and counterplot.

ZOHRA B passed the whole of his time on the terrace of his apartment. His imagination was entirely wrapped up in visions of hope, that the same destiny which had made him acquainted with the object of his love would also give him possession of her. That this could ever come to pass, was, to all appearance, so impossible, that any one less sanguine might have rejected the idea in despair; but many circumstances tended to cherish the feeling which now entirely possessed him. His servant Ali had related to him the manner in which the Princess had been informed of his presence on the terrace, and the facility with which she could look upon him. He himself had so practised his eye in remarking whenever any movement took place in the turret, that he could almost at once say

whether the corner, blessed in his estimation by the presence of his adored, was vacant or not; and having, as he thought, almost discovered, even by the light of the moon, motions of the head flattering to his passion, he now scarcely knew what rest was.

He had passed a sleepless night; his mind was jaded by feelings of the most various character, and life was almost become a gift of no value, when the door of his solitary dwelling was thrown open, the clatter of many iron-heeled slippers was heard in the court, and the Grand Vizir in person was announced.

After the usual compliments, the Vizir said, "Zohrab Khan, this is a fortunate hour. I must require a *mujdehlúk* * from you."

"How!" exclaimed the youth, with great alacrity of manner, "what has happened?"

"See!" said the Vizir, holding out a letter to him which he drew from his girdle, "this is worth a *mujdehlúk*. It comes from Asterabad."

"Wallah!" exclaimed the overjoyed youth, as if a light from heaven had suddenly shone

* *Mujdehlúk* is a present conferred on those who bring good news.

upon him : “ does it, by Allah !” Then at once forgetting every other feeling, he seized upon the letter with thankfulness, and devoured its contents with trembling anxiety. It was easy to trace the workings of affection in his countenance as he perused his father’s letter. Home and all its endearments were immediately presented to his imagination in their most glowing colours; and tears started into his eyes as he read the narrative of his mother’s sufferings at his supposed loss, and of her joy at receiving the tidings of his safety.

The good-natured minister did not interrupt the feelings to which the perusal of this letter had given rise, but allowed its contents to be fully understood; and then said, in a playful manner, “ I have still another present to exact for good news; for we learn that your honoured father is himself proceeding in person to the foot of the throne. Our embassy to him has, thanks to Allah and the Prophet! been successful. He accedes to the Shah’s proposals, and comes.”

Zohrab listened with serious interest to the Vizir’s words, and without expressing either joy or sorrow at the intelligence, merely said, “ To

me also he sends this news. God grant that whatever he and his friends may determine, may be for the best, and, more than all, that my situation may not have biassed their judgment!"

"Have no anxiety for the future, my friend," said Hajji Ibrahim; "God is great! God is merciful! The destinies of his creatures are in his hand; therefore, why should we have a thought for the morrow? The Shah moreover has announced his *shefakat*, his good feeling, towards you. He wishes to make you his own. He has sent a message to you, Zohrab Khan."

"Upon my eyes be it," said Zohrab, "if within my power! May the King's condescension never be less!"

"Open, then, your ears. You are young. You are, Mashallah! a man, and in truth entirely a man. The well-being of Irân requires that men of your merit should enter into the Shah's service; a kizzilbash like you must not be the servant of cows of Turcomans. Whatever you require he will give you! and to begin with one instance of his condescension, he bestows upon you a wife. You may well

open your eyes. Yes, the Shah sends you a wife from his own fortunate hands."

"Did you say a wife, O Khan?" inquired Zohrab, with looks of amazement. "I! what shall I do with a wife?"

"What words are these?" said the Vizir; "to settle in life man wants a partner, according as our holy religion has decreed. The King orders you to marry, and such a wife whom it is not the lot of every man to possess."

"And who may she be?" said Zohrab, with a faltering accent.

"She is your immediate neighbour," said the Vizir.

The youth's colour came and went as he anxiously waited the word.

"She is Zulma, the chief executioner's daughter," continued the Vizir. "Such another person does not exist in the world. The mistress of beauty, of accomplishments, and of activity; she is unrivalled among the maidens of Irân."

Upon hearing the name of Zulma, Zohrab's heart turned back upon him, for he could think of no other name than Amima, and, his disappointment and perplexity becoming great, he

did not know what to say. The news which he had received from home, added to the Shah's message, had taken him so much unawares, that he knew not what face to put upon it, and he therefore entreated the Vizir to allow him a short time to consider upon what had just been communicated to him. "But," said he, "with respect to the daughter of the chief executioner, however grateful I may be for the Shah's condescension, however I may admire her perfections, and however much I may feel honoured by being selected for her husband, yet, O Khan! see, can a broken man like me think of marrying? You who are a wise Vizir, one who knows the fitness of things, can I think of a house and a home when I am here a captive and a hostage, uncertain of my father's wishes and of his future fate?"

"Everything becomes fitting," answered the Vizir, "to one who enjoys the Shah's protection and good-will. Go, Zohrab Khan, do not think so ill of your own situation; the highest offices in the state are open to you, and with time and opportunity there is nothing to which a man of your merit may not aspire. I will report to the Shah what has passed, and

will say that after a little consideration you will give him your answer."

Upon this the Vizir took his departure, and left our hero in a very perplexed state of mind. The letter which he had received from his father alone gave him ample cause for reflection. What would be the results of his visit to the Shah? Was it possible that he and the Turcomans could have decided upon bowing the knee and claiming the skirt of one whom they so entirely contemned as the present ruler of Persia? He thought that impossible; and he felt sure that but for his unfortunate captivity this never could have taken place. He deplored his fate, at having thus become the source of such extensive mischief; and he then asked himself, would it not be worse than folly, would it not be wickedness in the extreme, to hearken to the Shah's flattering invitation to marry and settle in his service, before he knew what might be the full scope of his father's schemes?—for schemes he was sure he had, which ultimately would tend to emancipate him from the yoke of Persia. And then, when all his feelings for the adored of his heart rushed back upon him, he started at the bare idea of being united to any other.

He said to himself, "If my good stars do not aid me in attaining the possession of her whom I love, no one else shall Zohrab press to his heart. Be Zulma the choicest of the houris of the seventh heaven, she shall remain a stranger to me. Let me die rather than do what my heart disapproves."

In this fixed determination he remained lost in thought, every idea which crossed his mind afterwards being but a confirmation of this master-thought. He had for some time been, as it were, transfixed, seated at one corner of his carpet, when the door of his room was slowly and cautiously opened by a figure, whose hideous and unearthly aspect would have made a man of less nerve than himself conceive that he was visited by his evil genius in this moment of anxiety; but his first impulse was to call to Ali, his servant, and inquire why he allowed the entrance of intruders without previous permission.

The figure, without heeding this exclamation, quietly advanced towards Zohrab, and seated itself on his carpet. When we describe this being as crooked and deformed, with large head, shaggy beard, humped back, and the counte-

nance of a demon, our readers will recognize the Shah's barber and confidant. Wherever intrigue was in the wind, wherever something to be done by indirect means was in agitation, there this piece of deformity was sure to find employment. He possessed the peculiar talent of screwing himself into other people's affairs, and thereby of forwarding his master's schemes as well as his own. To aid his views, he had addicted himself to astrology, and in this science had acquired such celebrity that there was scarcely a man about the court who had not recourse to his advice. The daughter of the chief executioner had taken him into her special friendship, applied to him on all occasions in which cunning and duplicity were necessary, and in cases of difficulty made him consult the stars as a last resource. Her mind was as much a prey to superstition, as his was under the influence of craft; and it very frequently happened, that in the exercise of the horrid office of her father, in which she had made herself so powerful an instrument, the barber could so entirely command her interference, that he frequently rendered her subservient to his malice and revenge.

On the present occasion she did not omit to have recourse to his agency ; for although *duennas*, or *geessefids*, are generally the negociators in matters of marriage among the Persians, yet Zulma, who had long acted independently of established customs, and who was looked upon as a privileged person, chose on this occasion to make use of the interference of a male instead of a female. She confided to him the whole extent of her love and admiration of Zohrab, the ultimate object of which he was too happy to have an opportunity of forwarding ; for he felt that by so doing he should gain three things,—the approbation of the King, that of the parties concerned should the marriage take place, and the exclusion of his rival Sadek from their favour. He accordingly immediately entered, heart and soul, into her views ; and as soon as he knew that the Shah's wishes concerning the marriage had been intimated through the Grand Vizir to Zohrab, he also presented himself.

“ Mashallah, Mashallah ! praise be to God !” said the Humpback, making up a face of delight : “ See upon how beautiful a youth the condescension of our Shah, our King of kings,

has alighted ! Our eyes are brightened by the sight. Whose dog was Yusuf, whose Ferhad, whom the poets dared to call beautiful, when compared to you ?”

“ May your shadow never be less !” exclaimed our youth, surprised by the opening speech of his strange visiter ; “ but let me know in whose presence I am ?”

“ Your slave, who is less than the least,” said the Humpback, “ would be but a bit of foul earth were he not made scented clay by the approbation of that choicest rose in the rose-garden—the asylum of the universe. I am the King’s barber. The King has great love for me. I stand before him every morning ; and although destiny has made me crooked in person, yet it has made me straight by allowing me to stand under the shade of the royal eyebrow.”

“ Of this allow me to be glad,” said Zohrab, with some little irony in his manner : “ long may you enjoy such privileges, and may you become straighter and straighter every day ! But how may I be interested in this state of things ?”

“ You are in every way interested,” said the royal barber, “ because those who enjoy the

King's approbation must be interested for each other. The Shah's condescension for you is great. It was only this morning, when these unworthy hands were placed upon his most august head, (upon whom be the blessing of Allah!) and were taken up in the duty of your slave's office, that he said—'Goozoo,* Zohrab, the Mazanderani, has not his equal. Let Ferdusi talk of his Rustam, and of his Afrasiab; who has performed the feats of our Zohrab? It was destined among the glorious events of my reign that I should possess so valiant a subject!' He said so, by your soul!"

The youth bowed, and smiled in surprise at what this preamble was likely to bring forth.

" 'After all, I am a king,' " said the Humpback, continuing to quote the Shah, " 'and wherefore should I not do with my subjects what may seem best to me? I will make Zohrab happy!' He said so, by your father's soul! 'I will exalt his dignity, I will give him a house, I will give him money, I will give him slaves, I will give him a wife!' By the King's soul! by the King's salt! by the beard of the Prophet!" exclaimed this crafty and plotting

* *Goozoo*, a humpback.

liar, "the Shah said so! Upon this make your mind perfectly easy. Now, every thing is ready; the house is ready, the slaves are ready, the money is ready, and the wife is ready. After this, what is there wanting? Nothing but a fortunate hour; and to find one the best and the most fitting, leave your slave alone! Praise be to Allah! we also are not without our modicum of wit."

"You have forgot one more requisite in this affair," said Zohrab, with a suppressed smile.

"What may that be, light of my eyes?" eagerly inquired the Humpback.

"Only the consent of the principal party concerned, namely, your humble servant," said Zohrab.

"What words are these!" said the other, somewhat surprised at the observation. "Is not the will of the Shah conclusive? Besides, can it be that one of your wit, your judgment, your perfections, would reject advantages that every ass would see at first sight are unequalled? Do not make difficulties when every thing is easy; do not throw rocks on the highway, when it is as even as my hand."

"Hear my words," said Zohrab, with great

resolution in his manner and countenance; “ I am but young in the ways of the world; I know only one road through it, and that is the straight road. Whoever you may be, I will speak as plainly to you as I have to every one else on this subject. I own no master, after Allah and our holy Prophet, but my father. May the King’s shadow never be less, notwithstanding! I am grateful for his kind intentions towards me; but my father is my king, as he is my parent. It will not be long ere he arrive, and then whatever he may ordain for his son, that will I do, with the blessing of God.”

This straightforward language, so different from the deceitful phraseology of intrigue to which the Humpback was accustomed, disconcerted the negotiator for a few minutes, during which there was a dead silence; but, not willing to be foiled, he returned to the charge, hoping, by a description of the person rejected, to inflame the youthful imagination of his hearer. “ But you do not know upon what you turn your back when you refuse the daughter of this house. O man, she is a virgin without compare!—such eyes, such a complexion, such a person, have not been seen in Irân since the

days of the famous Shireen, or the still more famous Zuleika. Why will you not let your good fortune throw its kalaat over you? Ass must be written on the brow of the man who turns his back upon happiness. If you are ever to have a wife, reject not her whose look is like lightning, whose smile is like the dawn, whose mouth is the seat of love, who inflames the earth by her looks, and calms it by the readiness of her wit. Oh, my Aga! open your eyes well before you give a denial to that which you cannot fail to regret."

"Were I to be tempted by words," said Zohrab, "certainly yours would more than perform that office. Let me, however, say again, that at present I can as little retract my resolution as I can take the wife. If the Shah deigns to inquire after one so wretched as I, as you are a good mussulman, say that I pray his house may prosper, and that his shadow may continue to be extended over his slave; but add, that, by your head! by the salt of the Shah! and by the soul of my father! Zulma to me must ever be nothing!"

When the Humpback perceived that all his arts of persuasion had failed, and that he was

foiled in his scheme, the expression of his face became that of an assassin; he could have plunged a dagger into the heart of his victim, and drunk his blood. He slowly rose from his seat, and said between his teeth, "Hitherto you have not known who the Goozoo is; he is the despised of men, but, thank Allah! he is feared by them. Know!" said he, with great emphasis, "know, Zohrab Khan, that if Irân has one King, she also has one Humpback."

"And know also," said the unconcerned youth, "that there is a God in Heaven, and that we, *Alham du lillah* — thanks to Allah! fear neither Humpback nor Shah."

Upon which the interview ceased; the foiled intriguer departed with anger and future plot in his heart, whilst the man firm in rectitude continued careless of the future, and secure in his own integrity.

The Humpback immediately repaired to the daughter of the chief executioner, in order to give her a report of the ill success of his mission. He was admitted without demur into every harem in the city; but, the moment he appeared in this, he was received with distinguished attention, so well was he known to be

the friend and confidant of its mistress. He found Zulma descending the steps of the terrace, where she had been, with all her characteristic impatience, watching his exit from Zohrab's apartment. She did not wait for the formality of taking post on the carpets of an apartment, but at once made him crouch down near her behind a thick rose-tree, and thus accosted him.

"You look disturbed, my Aga," said she; "Is it to be, or is it not? Speak, I am sick at heart from expectation."

"What can I say, my khanum?" answered the deformity; "the heart of that man is as impenetrable as the jungles of his country. He looks upon us as *pooch*—nothing."

"Is it so?" said the haughty maiden, colouring through her brilliant brown skin, her eyes flashing a sentiment made up of rage and disappointment. "Are we then nothing in the world, that I am to be despised by an unsainted Mazanderani? Am I not then that Zulma who creates fear and love at pleasure? Say, Goozoo, say, am I less than nothing?"

"May his liver turn upon him!" exclaimed the Humpback.

“Look at these eyes,” said the offended maiden, with warmth, “are they not bright?—are these lips not red?—are my teeth less than pearls? and is my hair rivalled by that of other maidens? Are these arms nothing?—is my shape to be despised? Speak then, man,” as she seized her hearer’s sleeve, “did you describe all this to him, and did he still tell you his heart was stone?”

“Whatever was necessary I said,” answered the Humpback; “for, thanks to the Prophet! I am not without wit. I cannot say whither his sense has fled, for in truth he is a man of accomplishment; but certain it is that he cares neither for the Shah nor his power, and says he is the servant alone of Allah and his father.”

“What shall we do?” said the downcast maiden. “It is true, he has not seen me; and as yet, to him I am a stranger.”

“We must make a thought,” said the Humpback, with looks of reflection, at the same time seizing his chin with his hand; “there are many things to be done by those who have the Shah on their side. We shall be fools indeed, if we cannot find among us invention enough

to make a Rustam like this youth fall in love with the choicest of Irân's virgins."

"It would not do," said Zulma doubtingly, afraid to give utterance to her thought, "for a Persian girl to go in person to the Mazanderani youth?"

"The time is not yet come," answered her counsellor; "you must have patience, or our business will fail. Let me work in your service. I have not only mortals at my command, but, as you know, the heavens and stars are in my service. The Shah would indeed have selected a fool for his chief adviser," said he, with an air of importance, "if the Goozoo were not able to bring that about by art which ought to have been long accomplished by natural means."

"Would it not do to release him from his confinement, to show him friendship, to introduce him into our house, and thus give us an opportunity of meeting?" said the thoughtful Zulma.

"Allah, Allah!" exclaimed her friend; "you do not know this youth. He is one of those who do not return upon their word: who, if

they have once settled that death is better than life, will die, and say thanks to Allah for it. No, we must wind round and round him, as the tiger does before it falls upon the hind."

"But think on me, man!" exclaimed Zulma, rather disconcerted by this circuitous scheme. "Am I to sit in a corner, smoking the kalioon of expectation, whilst you are making your magic circles?"

"For the love of the Prophet!" said the Humpback, "be for once like a man, and not a woman; help me, and do not thwart what now passes in my head. I only ask patience of you."

"But you ask that," said Zulma, "of which I am not the mistress, not even for a moment, and of which all women are bankrupt. Speak of patience to those who sit in corners and want nothing, but not to a woman in love!"

At the word love the hideous barber gave a look of contempt, showing in what estimation he held those who allowed themselves to be enslaved by it; and then paused, as if he had hit upon some good scheme. "I have it, I have it!" said he; "I have made a plan which

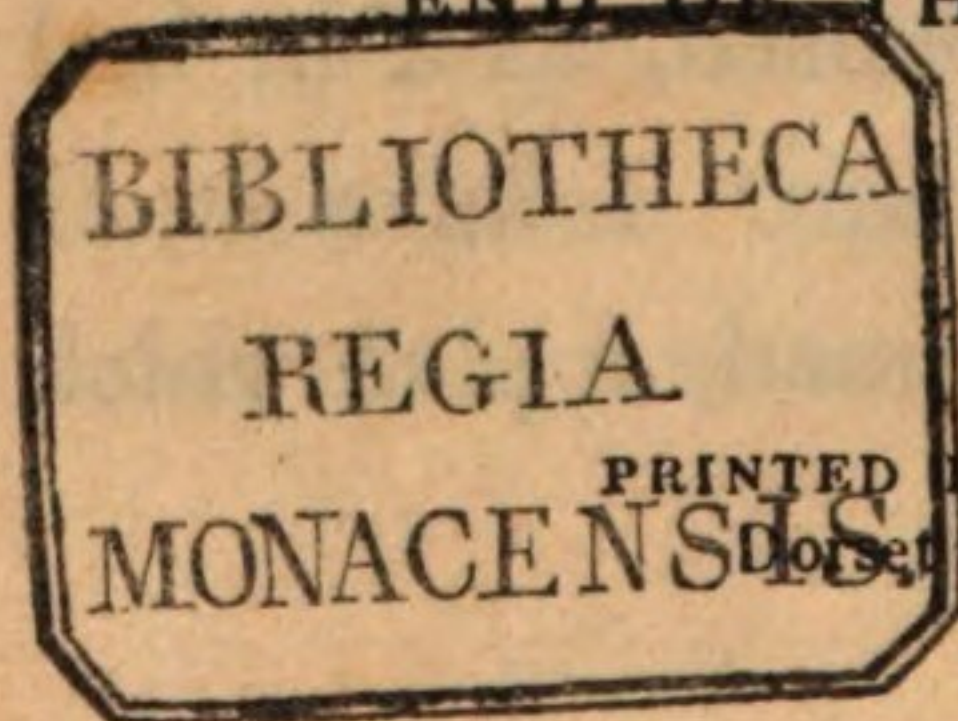
will not fail of producing its proper effect. Leave the Goozoo to his wit, and it will work like a talisman."

"What has happened?" said Zulma, with eagerness in her look. "Speak, for my soul is withered with expectation!"

Upon this he drew nearer to her, and then looking about him as if he were fearful of being overheard, whispered his scheme of future operations in her ear: to which lending the profoundest attention, she occasionally shook her head, as if disapproving of what he proposed, and then again nodded consent; although, when he had done, there were visible signs of disappointment in her manner and expression.

The conference being at an end, they parted; he, bent upon putting his project into execution, made the best haste towards the palace, whilst she, anxious as to its result, retreated to her own apartment.

END OF THE FIRST VOLUME.



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